OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

ALBANIA

Soumaya Maghnouj, Elizabeth Fordham, Caitlyn Guthrie, Kirsteen Henderson and Daniel Trujillo

In collaboration with

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OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania

Soumaya Maghnouj, Elizabeth Fordham, Caitlyn Guthrie, Kirsteen Henderson and Daniel Trujillo

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Please cite this publication as:
Maghnouj, S. et al. (2020), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, *https://doi.org/10.1787/d267dc93-en*.

ISBN 978-92-64-76480-4 (print)
ISBN 978-92-64-50094-5 (pdf)

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education
ISSN 2223-0947 (print)
ISSN 2223-0955 (online)

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Foreword

This review was undertaken in partnership by the OECD and UNICEF in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth in Albania. It builds on the collaboration between the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills and UNICEF, benefitting from our organisations' complementary experience and expertise. The review provides an analysis that is grounded in the context of educational evaluation and assessment in Albania, while drawing on international research and best practice from around the world.

Albania has made progress in expanding access to education and improving learning outcomes. However, a large share of students in Albania continue to struggle with mastering basic competencies needed for work and life, and student characteristics such as ethnic and linguistic background continue to influence educational outcomes. Albania's educational assessment and evaluation systems require strong and strategic reforms to improve quality and equity and ensure all students are prepared to participate fully and thrive in a knowledge-based society.

This review offers recommendations to help Albania capitalise on promising policies and practices that are already in place. The proposals place student learning at the heart of educational evaluation and assessment. This means that recommendations on student assessment, teacher appraisal, and school and system evaluation are oriented toward the ultimate aim of helping students learn.

Above all, we hope that this review will be a useful reference for Albania as it reforms its educational evaluation and assessment systems. This review comes at an important moment for Albania as it develops its next national education strategy. The review discusses many of the policy options that the country is considering and provides guidance that can be used to inform decision-making. We hope that the review's recommendations contribute to the development of an education system that provides excellence for all.

Andreas Schleicher

Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD Secretary-General

Roberto De Bernardi

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Acknowledgements

This review was funded by UNICEF and developed in close co-operation with UNICEF's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and UNICEF's Albania Country Office, whose staff provided valuable guidance and support throughout. In particular, the review team would like to thank Parmosivea Soobrayan, Regional Education Advisor for Europe and Central Asia, for his co-operation and commitment to the partnership between the OECD and UNICEF. The review team would like to convey its sincere appreciation to the UNICEF Albania Country Office, led by Roberto de Bernardi, Representative. We would also like to thank the UNICEF Albania education team, notably Linda Bushati, Early Learning Education Specialist, and Ermelinda Ikonomi, Consultant, for their guidance, support and insights.

The review team would further like to thank the Government of Albania, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, for its support and contributions to the review. The review has strongly benefitted from the encouragement and support of Zamira Gjini, General Director of the General Directorate for Policies and Development of Education, who also chaired the Steering Committee.

We are very grateful to the officials and education experts from the ministry and beyond, who graciously shared their insights and knowledge with us, in particular the members of the Steering Committee: Gerti Janaqi, General Director of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education; Rezana Vrapi, General Director of the Education Services Centre; and Shqiponja Lamce, Specialist, Directorate for the Development of Education Programmes. We would also like to thank Agim Alia from the Education Services Centre and Antoneta Rama and Dorina Rapti from the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education for their valuable contributions to the review.

We sincerely thank all the participants in the review visits, including officials from the ministry and its agencies – the Education Services Centre, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. We would also like to extend our gratitude to other national bodies, such as the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications, and the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation, to regional and local education offices and to civil society organisations, as well as to international bodies including the European Union delegation. We are grateful to the researchers, non-governmental organisations, school leaders, teachers, teachers' unions, parents and students who kindly gave their time to share their views, experience and knowledge with us. We would especially like to thank the schools in Tirana and Vore for welcoming us so warmly during our review visits.

The OECD review team was led by Elizabeth Fordham (OECD Secretariat), co-ordinated by Soumaya Maghnouj (OECD Secretariat) and included Caitlyn Guthrie (OECD Secretariat), Kirsteen Henderson (external expert, Canada) and Daniel Trujillo (OECD Secretariat). We would like to thank George Bethell (Director of Anglia Assessment), who provided valuable input and advice. Within the OECD

Secretariat, we would also like to thank Anna Vitória Périco e Santos who made very helpful contributions to the report. The review team is grateful for the support and advice from Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Paulo Santiago, Head of Policy Advice and Implementation Division. Sara Gouveia provided administrative support and organised the publication process and Rachel Linden helped to prepare the draft for publication.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AQAPUE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EO	Education Office
ESC	Educational Services Centre
ESCS	PISA index of economic, social and cultural status
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	Information Technology
LGU	Local Government Unit
MoESY	Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OSM	On-screen marking
PESTL	Political, economic, social, technological and legal factors
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment
RED	Regional Education Directorate
SES	Socio-economic status
SICI	Standing International Conference of Inspectorates
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VANAF	Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

Albania has made improvements in access to education and in raising learning outcomes over the last two decades, moving from one of the lowest performers in the Western Balkans to one of the fastest improvers. Recent reforms include the development of a competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and a school evaluation indicator framework. Most recently, Albania has restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation, in an effort to further deconcentrate central functions and improve service delivery. However, disparities in opportunity and outcomes persist across population groups. Albania has one of the highest rates of dropout in the Western Balkans, and a large share of students in Albania continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies needed for work and life. Addressing these educational challenges is crucial for improving Albania's economic development and competitiveness as it looks toward joining the European Union.

This review examines how educational evaluation and assessment systems can help Albania detect and address gaps in learning and ensure all students graduate with relevant competencies. It provides recommendations intended to help set priorities for modernising and strengthening these systems, while also informing the development of Albania's new national education strategy in 2020. In particular, this review recommends Albania help teachers make better use of assessment to improve learning and utilise the ongoing review of its national assessment and examination system to promote improved assessment practices in classrooms. This will require modernising the teaching profession, strengthening school leadership and building the capacity of schools to engage in self-evaluation. To monitor, evaluate and improve educational system performance, Albania will need to further develop its student information management system and build the capacity of institutions to use it as a tool for evidence-based policy-making and strategic planning.

Improving student learning outcomes through student assessment

Albania is working to reform school-based assessment practices and national examinations to better reflect the curriculum, which places an emphasis on student-centred approaches and the development of higher-order competencies. Recent assessment reforms include encouraging teachers to use portfolios of student work to develop a culture of self-reflection among students and assess a wider range of competences, as well as using information from regular assessments such continuous assessment to inform teaching. However, teachers need more support in implementing these strategies effectively and in diagnosing and addressing learning gaps as students progress through schooling. Albania will also need to improve the ability of its national examination system (i.e. the National Basic Education Examination and the State Matura Examination) to provide information on what students know and can do with respect to the new curriculum. This review provides recommendations to help Albania strengthen classroom and national assessment policies and practices in these regards. This includes providing teachers with training opportunities

and materials on classroom assessment practice, including how to use assessment results formatively to guide teaching and learning. Albania will also need to review the design and implementation of its national evaluation system to ensure it provides valid and reliable results, as well as to build capacity across the teacher workforce.

Supporting teachers' professional growth

Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance and competencies. This process can be used to identify teachers' training needs and encourage them to continuously develop their competencies. However, in Albania, certain policies and practices limit the ability of appraisal processes to support teachers' professional growth. For example, promotion within the teacher career structure is based primarily on years of service and an exam that does not authentically measure teaching competence. This review recommends Albania revise the teacher career structure and the appraisal for promotion process to require teachers to demonstrate more advanced competencies to access higher career stages. To ensure that new entrants to the profession are also equipped with the competencies they need to be effective, Albania will need to expand efforts to improve initial teacher preparation and selection. This review also recommends that Albania further support teachers' ongoing professional growth and mastery of the new curriculum requirements. In particular, Albania will need to develop the regular appraisal of teachers into a more formative process, as well as build the capacity of established teacher professional learning networks to facilitate collaborate learning.

Supporting school evaluation for improvement

School evaluation serves the dual purpose of helping schools improve their practices and keeping them accountable for the quality of their work. In Albania, schools are required to conduct regular self-evaluations, and external school evaluations focus on assessing the quality of instruction through classroom observations. The recent re-organisation of external school evaluation governance aims to enhance capacity to evaluate and provide support to schools, as very few external school evaluations have been conducted over the last several years due to under-resourcing of the former inspection agency. However, some aspects compromise the quality of evaluations and their use to inform school improvement. In particular, the new governance structure for external school evaluation puts the objectivity of the evaluation process in jeopardy, as new regional external evaluators will likely be tasked with helping improve the practices of schools they have evaluated. Gaps in training, tools and data for self-evaluation, chronic underfunding and funding disparities, and weaknesses in school leadership limit schools' capacity to conduct self-evaluations effectively and to use evaluation results to meaningfully improve. This review provides recommendations to help Albania strengthen school evaluation and support schools to improve their practices. As a priority, Albania should consolidate responsibility for external school evaluation within one central body and provide technical supports and financial resources to schools to help them act upon external evaluation findings. Albania will also need to build schools' capacity to improve by providing training and tools on self-evaluation and, through the new School of Directors, developing principals' instructional leadership.

Strengthening capacity to evaluate system performance

System evaluation refers to the processes that countries use to monitor and evaluate the performance of their education systems. A strong evaluation system serves two main functions: improving educational performance and holding the government and other stakeholders accountable for meeting national goals. Albania has started to establish some of the components integral to system evaluation, including the development of a modern Education Management Information System (EMIS). However, developing system evaluation in Albania is limited by the availability of co-ordinated and high-quality data, as well as a relatively weak culture of evaluation within the government. Strategies and policies are often set without sufficient analysis, regular monitoring and reporting on progress is limited, and the impetus to address capacity constraints and further develop the tools needed for comprehensive system evaluation is lacking. This review recommends several measures that Albania can take in order to develop stronger capacity for conducting system evaluation and better co-ordinate the actors who contribute to this process. These include developing the national indicator framework to guide the development of the EMIS, and establishing the latter as the central source of education data. To ensure evidence is used to support strategic planning and to prioritise and achieve national education goals, Albania will also need to build stronger demand for information and analysis within government and develop the institutional capacity and procedures to support a culture of system evaluation. The development of a new education strategy presents an opportunity for Albania to embed evaluation more centrally in the government's planning and policy-making processes.

Assessment and Recommendations

Introduction

Albania has made improvements in access to education and in raising learning outcomes over the last two decades, moving from one of the lowest performers in the Western Balkans to one of the fastest improvers. Recent reforms include the development of a competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and a school evaluation indicator framework. Most recently, Albania has restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation, in an effort to further deconcentrate central functions and improve service delivery. However, disparities in opportunity and outcomes persist across population groups. Albania has one of the highest rates of dropout in the Western Balkans, and a large share of students in Albania continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies needed for work and life. Addressing these educational challenges is crucial for improving Albania's economic development and competitiveness as it looks toward joining the European Union (EU).

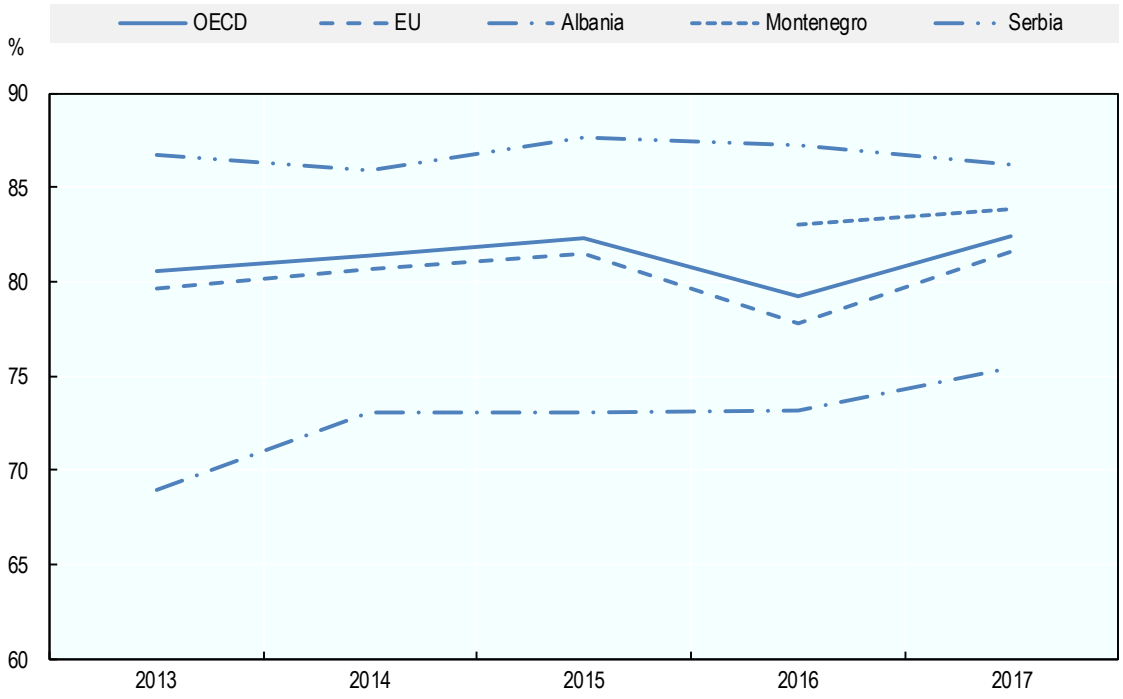
This review looks at how educational evaluation and assessment can support this agenda. It provides recommendations intended to help set priorities for modernising evaluation and assessment systems and improving student learning, while also informing the development of Albania's new national education strategy in 2020. Strengthening these systems will help Albania detect and address gaps in learning and ensure all students graduate with relevant competencies. In particular, Albania will need to improve initial teacher selection and preparation to ensure teachers are prepared to engage with the new curriculum and use assessment results to inform their practice. Albania will also need to ensure in-service teacher skills are up-to-date by providing incentives and opportunities for professional growth and by fostering collaborative learning. The ongoing review of the national assessment and examinations system will also be important to improve reliability of results and bolster teachers' ability to assess their students and modify their practice. These reforms will require strengthening school leadership and the capacity of schools to engage in self-evaluation. Albania will also need to further develop its education management information system (EMIS) to establish a central source for educational data and build the capacity of institutions to use it as a tool for evidence-based policy-making and strategic planning.

Main trends

Enrolment in primary education has increased to EU and OECD levels, but participation in secondary education remains low

Since 2009, enrolment rates at the primary level have trended upward (UIS, 2020[1]). The net enrolment rate in primary education in Albania in 2017 was 96%, comparable to that of OECD countries on average (96%) and the EU (96%). At the lower secondary level, the Albanian net enrolment rate (86%) in 2017 was below that of the EU and the OECD (91%). Upper secondary education net enrolment rates have also remained below the OECD and EU averages and below the rates in Montenegro and Serbia (see Figure 1), reflecting in part the comparatively high dropout rates in Albania.

Figure 1. Net enrolment rates in upper secondary education



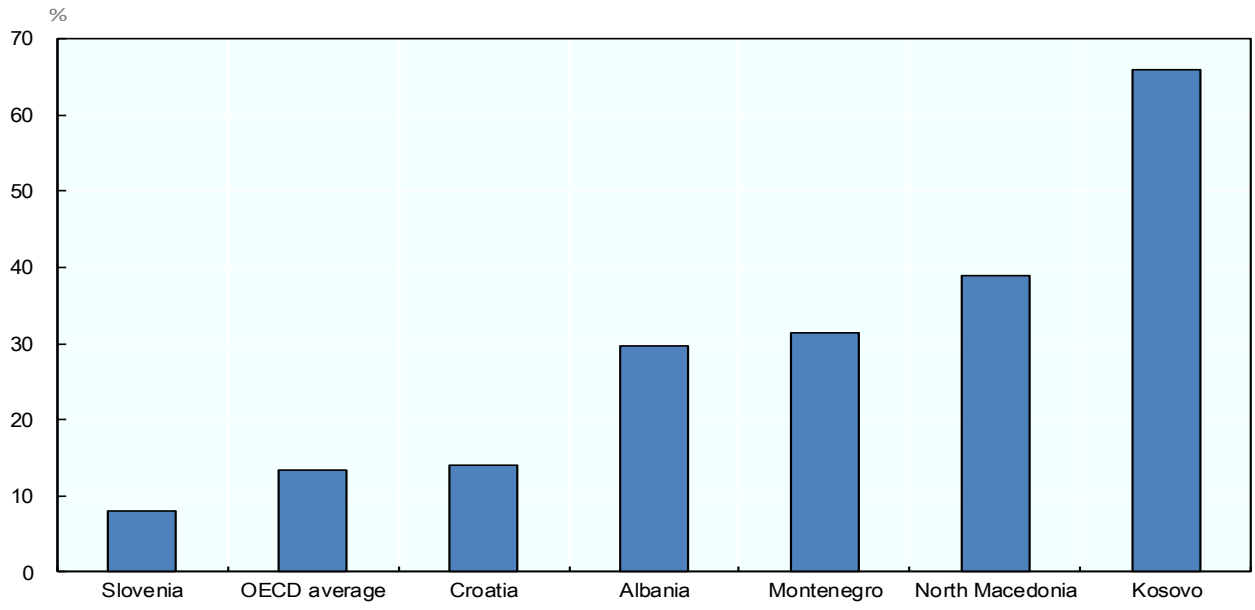
Source: UIS (2020[1]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/ (accessed on 16 January 2020).

Many students lack basic skills, but learning outcomes have improved over time

Data from OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that a large number of students in Albania are not acquiring the basic competencies needed to participate fully in a knowledge-based society upon completion of compulsory education. Over half of 15-year-olds in Albania lack basic reading skills (52.2%) and 2 in 5 lack basic numeracy skills (OECD, 2019[2]). This compares to 22.6% and 24.0% on average in the OECD respectively. Moreover, 29.7% of students are not demonstrating basic proficiency in any of the three domains (reading, mathematics and science), a share more than double the OECD average (13.4%) though below neighbouring countries such as Montenegro (31.5%), North Macedonia (39%) and Kosovo (66%) (see Figure 2).

However, learning outcomes are improving: the average three-year trend in mean score in all three PISA subjects is positive and significant, with particularly rapid improvements in mathematics. Importantly, the gap between the highest- and lowest-achieving students is closing, with improvements in the bottom of the performance distribution outpacing improvements at the top in every subject.

Figure 2. Share of low achievers in all three core PISA subjects (below Level 2)

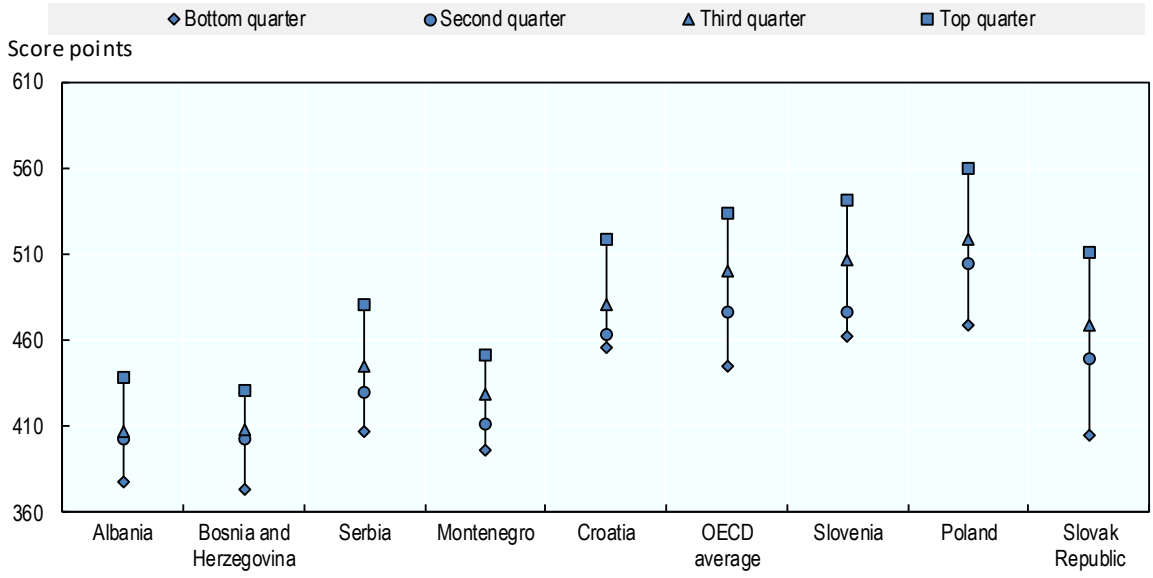


Source: OECD (2019[2]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

Participation and outcomes vary by disadvantaged groups and regions

Data from PISA 2018 show students from more disadvantaged backgrounds (bottom quarter of PISA's index of economic, social and cultural status) in Albania performed about two years (61 score-point difference) behind their more advantaged peers (top quarter) in the reading domain (see Figure 3). While this gap is not as large as that found across OECD countries (average difference of 89 score points), it is slightly larger than neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina (58) and Montenegro (55) (OECD, 2019[3]). Despite this, 12.3% of students in Albania from disadvantaged backgrounds are considered academically resilient, compared to an OECD average of 11.3% (OECD, 2019[3]).

Figure 3. Mean performance in reading by national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (PISA 2018)



Source: OECD (2019[3]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en.

Similar to other countries in the region, educational outcomes tend to be lower in rural areas. For example, average educational attainment in rural regions is about two years of schooling lower than in urban regions (Psacharopoulos, 2017[4]). With respect to learning outcomes, data from PISA 2018 indicate that, in all three domains, students from rural schools in Albania have lower mean scores than students from urban schools (OECD, 2018[5]). While students from urban schools outperform students from rural schools in most OECD countries, the difference in reading performance is lower in Albania (difference of 33 points) than on average across OECD countries (difference of 43 points). National assessment and examinations data show a similar pattern, with students from cities outperforming students from rural areas.

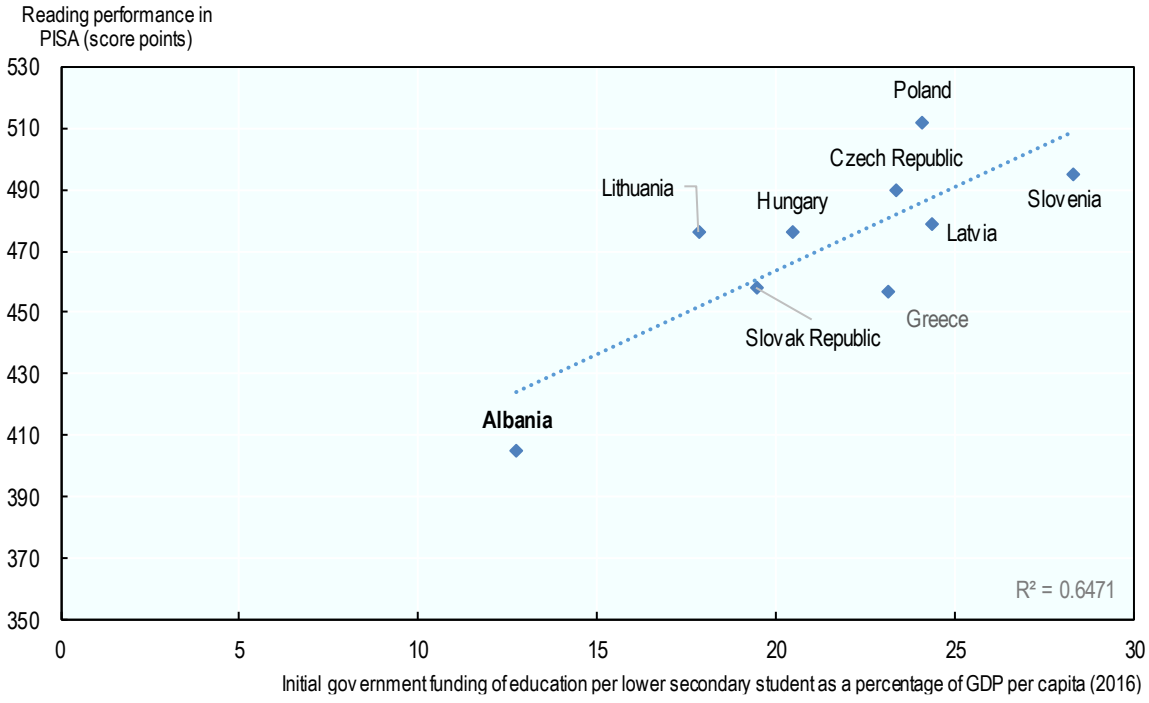
Participation and outcomes also vary by ethnic background, and are particularly low for Roma and for Balkan Egyptians. Among Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20, roughly 1% and 5% respectively have completed secondary education (UNESCO, 2017[6]). For Roma specifically, the school dropout rate is about 50% (Psacharopoulos, 2017[4]), and by some estimates over half of Roma children aged 6-16 have never been enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2017[6]).

Spending on education is low

As a percentage of GDP, expenditure in education in 2016 was lower in Albania (4.0%) than on average in the OECD (5.4 %) and the EU (5.1%) (UIS, 2020[1]). The share of total government expenditure that Albania allocated to education in 2016 was 13.6%, higher than in the EU (11.8%) and slightly higher than on average in OECD countries (13.2%). Over the last two decades, education spending as a percentage of GDP and as the share of government expenditure has been increasing in Albania, peaking in 2016, the most recent year for which there is international data.

Below a certain expenditure threshold, data from PISA 2015 indicate that higher education spending is significantly associated with higher scores on PISA (OECD, 2016[7]). Results from PISA 2018 for Albania and other European and OECD countries indicate that Albania remains in a low spending and low results trap (see Figure 4). While there is scope for Albania to achieve better results with the resources it invests, increased funding will be important for achieving significant gains in learning outcomes.

Figure 4. PISA 2018 results and government expenditure on lower secondary education



Note: Internationally comparable data on cumulative expenditure per student for Albania is unavailable.
Source: UIS (2020[1]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/; OECD (2019[2]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

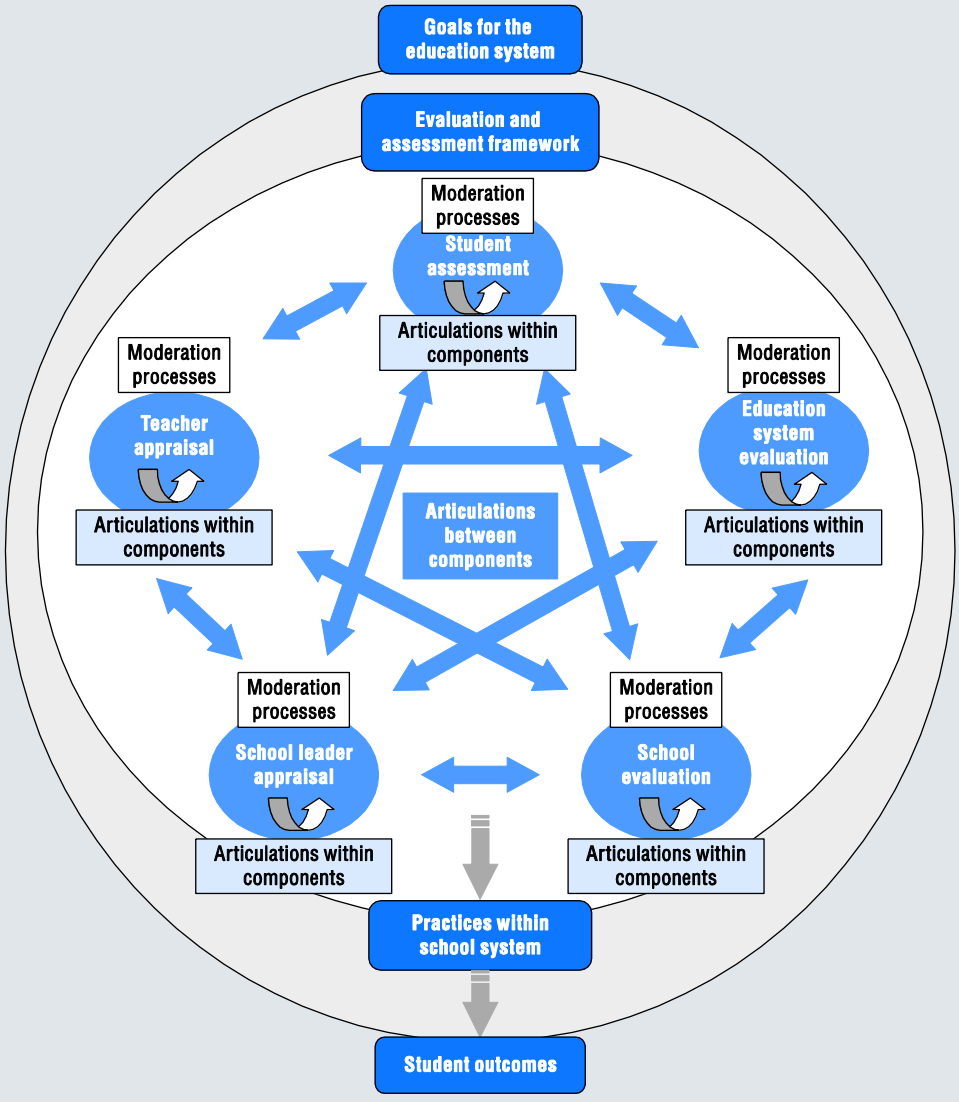
Evaluation and assessment in Albania

This review analyses how policies for assessing student learning, appraising teachers, evaluating schools and evaluating the performance of the education system as a whole can be used to improve student outcomes in Albania. The review draws upon the OECD's analysis of policies and practices for evaluation and assessment in over 30 education systems to identify how Albania can raise the quality of teaching and learning in schools (see Box 1). In undertaking this review, the OECD team identified three interrelated, systemic priorities to address in order to strengthen evaluation and assessment in Albania's education system.

Box 1. OECD reviews on evaluation and assessment

The OECD reviews show how the components of evaluation and assessment – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, school leader appraisal and system evaluation – can be developed in synergy to enhance student achievement in primary and secondary education (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Interactions within the evaluation and assessment framework



This work has highlighted three hallmarks of a strong evaluation and assessment framework:

- Setting clear standards for what is expected nationally of students, teachers, schools and the system overall. Countries that achieve high levels of quality and equity set ambitious goals for all, but are also responsive to different needs and contexts.

- Collecting data and information on current learning and education performance. This is important for accountability – so that objectives are followed through – but also for improvement, so that students, teachers, schools and policy makers receive the feedback they need to reflect critically on their own progress, and remain engaged and motivated to succeed.
- Achieving coherence across the evaluation and assessment system. This means, for example, that school evaluation values the types of teaching and assessment practices that effectively support student learning, and that teachers are appraised on the basis of the knowledge and skills that promote national education goals. This is critical to ensure that the whole education system is working in the same direction, and that resources are used effectively.

Source: OECD (2013[8]), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

Modernising and professionalising teaching

Teachers play a central role in helping students develop the skills needed to be competitive once they enter the labour force and become engaged citizens. To take on this important task, teachers need to be motivated, knowledgeable and competent educators. This requires external support and guidance from governments and school leadership. Such support is particularly important in Albania where a major reform of the curriculum since 2014 has changed the expectations of teachers' roles. For example, teachers are now expected to use student-centred approaches to support learning in their classrooms. However, many teachers in Albania continue to use a traditional teacher-centred approach to teaching, and interviews with teachers show a limited application of some of the most innovative aspects of the reform such as formative assessment and teaching of twenty-first century skills.

Several structural barriers have contributed to this situation. First, the teacher career structure does not encourage professional growth. Teacher promotion is based primarily on number of years of work experience and the results of a written exam rather than demonstrated higher levels of competency. Second, initial teacher preparation does not adequately prepare new teachers. There is no mechanism for assuring the quality of initial teacher preparation programmes, and a 2015 reform meant to update the initial teacher education curriculum has not been implemented. Additionally, the onerous process to enter the teaching profession and a lack of support in the first years of teaching, such as mentoring or training, may also discourage many talented candidates from entering the profession. Notably, this process requires teachers to undergo a one-year unpaid internship after graduating initial teacher education. Improving teachers' skills once they are in school also presents challenges. Schools are not provided with a budget for the professional development of their staff, which limits their capacity to organise in-school professional learning activities.

This review makes several recommendations about how Albania can modernise and professionalise teaching. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) will need to revise the teaching standards to ensure that levels of competency are differentiated for each career level and used to inform appraisal for career advancement, initial selection into the profession and regular in-school appraisal. Supporting newly employed teachers through an induction programme and mentorship will also be important for ensuring quality candidates enter and remain in the profession. In-service teachers will need further external guidance and support, particularly in the area of assessment practice,

to engage in the student-centred practices demanded by the new curriculum reform. Strengthening the role of school principals in helping teachers develop will also be important. This should include support for engaging in formative appraisals and using appraisal information to identify teachers' training needs. Albania will need to ensure that schools have discretionary funding to use for staff professional development and strengthen the quality of professional learning networks, in part, to better support teachers' in-school learning.

Ensuring access to quality education in rural and remote areas

Albania faces significant challenge in providing quality education for students in low-density rural and mountainous areas where 40% of the population live. Learning outcomes as measured by the national assessment and examinations and by PISA are lower in rural areas than in urban centres. Moreover, the decline in student population is particularly acute in rural and remote areas, making it difficult for the ministry to ensure the delivery of quality education services such as training for teachers or support for school improvement. Many schools in rural areas lack instructional materials and struggle to meet their basic infrastructure needs (e.g. heating), which are funded by municipalities (Gjokutaj, 2013[9]; OECD, 2016[7]). Albania is also facing difficulties in attracting teachers to work in rural and remote areas. While there is a surplus of teachers nationally, many rural areas are facing shortages. The difficult working conditions and limited training on how to teach in a rural context may explain why teachers are reluctant to work in these areas. The government has tried to address some of these issues by providing additional subsidies to staff working in rural schools such as subsidies for transport. The ministry is also reviewing how schools are funded in order to take further account of schools' socio-economic context and is planning to facilitate schools' access to discretionary grants and private funding. However, to address issues of quality in rural and remote areas teachers and schools will need further support in changing their educational practices.

This review makes several recommendations about how Albania can ensure that students in rural and remote areas have access to quality education. Strengthening financial and non-financial incentives for both new and experienced teachers to work in rural areas will be important. This should be complemented with the provision of relevant training, for example, on teaching multi-grade classes that can improve the quality of teaching and learning in these settings. Regional directorates should prioritise technical support in those schools where external evaluation indicates quality and performance are lowest. The development of the new EMIS provides an opportunity to ensure better data on indicators such as student socio-economic background and school funding and performance are collected and used to inform management of resources and planning for improvement. Support for changing teacher and school practices could also be strengthened by expanding structured networking opportunities and exploring the possibility of consolidating schools into either hubs or clusters of schools.

Providing reliable information on student progress against national standards

In Albania, teacher classroom assessment judgements about student learning against national standards tend to lack reliability, as teachers lack access to standard measures and do not typically engage in moderation exercises within or across schools. Nationally reliable external benchmarks can help teachers detect and address learning gaps as they emerge and can be used as a point of reference for making accurate judgements about student progress (OECD, 2013[8]). A national assessment, in particular, provides reliable data on student learning outcomes that are comparable across different groups of students

and over time. However, in Albania, the national assessment, the Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF), does not provide comparable results at the system level because marking and moderation procedures are not standardised across the country. As a result, there is no nationally standardised measure of student achievement before Grade 12 when students take the State Matura Exam. While Albania participates in PISA and results from TIMSS and PIRLS will soon be available, international assessments cannot measure how well students are meeting the national curriculum standards nor do they provide schools with granular information about their students' performance.

This review recommends measures that Albania can take to improve the reliability of the VANAF and its use to inform classroom practices, as well as system-level policies. In particular, Albania needs to improve the marking and moderation processes of the VANAF so that it is comparable across regions. Albania should also consider prioritising a census-based assessment in early grades to identify potential learning difficulties before they become problematic later on. This is particularly important for identifying gaps in achievement of national standards and modifying classroom practices to redress them early on. Teachers will need support in analysing contextualised and disaggregated results, as well as in using relevant benchmarks to compare their students' performance.

Improving student learning outcomes through student assessment

The primary purpose of student assessment is to determine what students know and are capable of doing. This information is then used to help students advance in their learning. In Albania, recent assessment reforms have sought to improve student outcomes by introducing methods shown by research to help strengthen student agency and deepen learning. For example, teachers are encouraged to use information from regular assessments (e.g. continuous assessment) to inform their teaching and develop a culture of self-reflection among their students through the use of student portfolios. However, teachers need more support in implementing these strategies effectively and in diagnosing and addressing learning gaps as students progress through schooling. To make better use of assessment to improve learning, Albania will need to provide teachers with training opportunities and materials on classroom assessment practice. To further support this aim, Albania will also need to review the national examination system - the National Basic Education Examination and the State Matura Examination - to improve its ability to provide information on what students know and can do with respect to the new curriculum, as well as to strengthen its positive backwash effect on teaching practices in schools.

Policy issue 2.1. Supporting teachers to make better use of assessment to improve student learning

As part of recent curriculum reforms, Albania has introduced an ambitious assessment framework that encourages teachers to assess their students regularly and use the results to inform teaching and learning. However, teachers have struggled to use assessment practices such as continuous assessment and portfolio assessment for more formative rather than summative purposes, as envisioned by the assessment framework. Several factors have contributed to this limited shift in classroom practice. For example, while learning outcomes are described by curriculum stage, teachers receive little guidance on student learning expectations by grade level. Definitions of formative assessment and continuous assessment in national policy documents also lack clarity. In some cases, national policies in areas such as teacher appraisal and school evaluation contradict the developmental intent of the national assessment framework and continue to reinforce a predominantly summative assessment culture in classrooms.

In order to make better educational use of assessment, teachers need to have access to quality supports such as clear guiding documents, tools and training (see Box 2). However, current resources are not sufficient to help teachers develop their skills in areas such as diagnostic assessment and portfolio assessment. New teachers face particular challenges, with most entering the profession ill-prepared to apply the new assessment framework. There is currently no quality assurance mechanism to ensure that initial teacher education programmes adequately cover key aspects of assessment literacy, such as how to provide effective feedback to students. Once in school, teachers' access to continuous professional development on assessment is limited and insufficient to remedy these gaps. In particular, while in-school subject teams engage in discussions around assessment practice, they receive very little guidance on how to work together meaningfully to improve their practice.

Box 2. Recommended actions for supporting teachers to make better use of assessment to improve learning

Recommendation 2.1.1. Revise and further clarify national assessment policies. The ministry needs to ensure that the assessment practices expected of teachers are clear and understood and that teachers receive support on how to implement them in their classroom context. First, the new Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-University Education (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency) should develop expected learning outcomes by grade level, building on the learning achievement outcomes by curriculum stage. These should be accompanied by exemplars of marked student work and student-level data from the national assessment (VANAF). This will help teachers and students to better understand what they are working towards and to calibrate their judgements with external benchmarks. Second, the Quality Assurance Agency should do more to support and promote the use of formative assessment, for example by developing a formative assessment toolkit for teachers and launching a communication campaign. Third, the ministry should ensure that teachers have the space to use assessment more formatively by reducing the frequency of summative marking and setting a maximum of six marks that are used to calculate the final yearly mark. Finally, monitoring and accountability tools such as teacher appraisal and school evaluation processes should be revised to reinforce the formative intent of national assessment policies. School principals should review regularly teachers' assessment practices and provide feedback on how to develop in this area. Schools should be held accountable for the quality of assessment practices and their use in advancing student learning.

Recommendation 2.1.2. Provide teachers with guidelines and tools to help them improve their assessment practice. Teachers need support in developing their assessment practice and in particular their capacity to design reliable tests, provide meaningful feedback to students and use the information from assessment in their teaching. The Quality Assurance Agency should revise the student report card template to include a space for written feedback and provide guidelines for teachers on how to deliver written feedback against grade-specific learning expectations. Teachers should also be supported in using new assessment types, including diagnostic assessment and portfolio assessment to inform teaching and learning practices. The Educational Services Centre (ESC) should encourage teachers to evaluate their students' competencies at the start of the year or a new learning unit by providing sample diagnostic assessment questions. The ESC might also consider developing fully standardised diagnostic assessments for key transition grades to help teachers assess more reliably their students' competencies against the expected learning outcomes. This should be accompanied by examples of how to use assessment results to inform lesson planning and support differentiation of instruction. The use of portfolio assessment could also be strengthened by

providing further guidance and training on how to create high-quality tasks and develop criteria for marking these tasks. To stimulate more reflection by students on their portfolio tasks, the ministry could also look toward introducing a portfolio defence at the end of key curriculum stages.

Recommendation 2.1.3. Ensure that teachers have access to quality training on assessment and incentives to participate in such training. Inadequate preparation and training on assessment and the use of results to improve learning limits teachers' ability to engage in these practices**.** In order to ensure teachers entering the profession are prepared, the Quality Assurance Agency should define the key features of quality preparation in assessment and require that these be addressed in initial teacher preparation programmes. Initial teacher preparation programmes should also be mandated to include opportunities for practical experience in designing and implementing assessments. The Quality Assurance Agency should also provide mandatory and free training on key elements of the assessment framework for in-service teachers. Teachers should be required to set annual objectives on assessment and school principals should regularly evaluate assessment practices in their schools. School principals should also be responsible for ensuring that teachers who do not meet the minimum level of competencies receive additional training and coaching. In-school teacher collaborative learning on assessment can also help develop assessment literacy. The Quality Assurance Agency should clearly define topics such as formative assessment and reliability of grading on which both professional networks and subject teams should focus, encouraging a connection and follow-up between what is discussed in both settings. Schools should be encouraged to select a teacher to serve as an assessment co-ordinator, who would organise moderation sessions and facilitate discussions on assessment practice. To support these activities, the Quality Assurance Agency will need to expand the online supports available to teachers and ensure guidelines and tools are easily accessible.

Policy issue 2.2. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the exam system

While both the National Basic Education Examination (Grade 9) and the State Matura Examination (Grade 12) are relatively fit for purpose and compare positively in terms of design to exams in other Western Balkan countries, they would benefit from continuous improvement to increase their reliability in assessing students' learning and to promote improved assessment practices in classrooms. The National Basic Education Examination, for example, does not provide nationally comparable results because of variations in the quality of administration and marking of tests across the country. Individual local education offices administer and mark the exam, and conditions in testing centres do not always meet minimum standards. Additionally, local education offices have struggled to recruit qualified teachers to serve as test markers. One way to improve exam reliability is to follow the shift of the State Matura Examination to on-screen marking (see Box 3). This could be a stepping stone to the introduction of computer-based assessments in the medium term for both exams. The design of the National Basic Education Examination could also be improved to strengthen the reliability of exam results and bolster teachers' assessment practice.

While the State Matura Examination provides nationally comparable results, the exam's quality could be further improved to better assess students' learning achievement and inform teaching and learning practices in classrooms (see Box 3). For example, while a few items in the mathematics test appear to have some real-world context, most of these items do not ask students to use mathematical concepts to solve problems they might encounter in real life. Moreover, few teachers are involved in the development of test items, which

limits the impact on wider classroom practice. Additionally, the current fixed pass/fail cut-score neither allows Albania to produce comparisons over time nor to link results to expected levels of achievement found in the curriculum.

Box 3. Recommended actions for ensuring the reliability and validity of the exam system

Recommendation 2.2.1. Reinforce the reliability of the National Basic Education Examination and review its design. The ministry and the ESC should revise the exam design and its administration to ensure it fairly assesses students' learning. The ministry needs to ensure that teachers selected to be test markers and administrators are motivated and have the necessary competencies for the role. To do so, the ministry should provide incentives for evaluators such as adequate remuneration and the incorporation of the role of evaluator into the teacher career structure. The ESC should design training and ensure the training is effectively delivered by individual local education offices. In addition, the ESC should be given a mandate for quality control to ensure conditions and security measures in testing centres are adequate. These measures will require additional resources for the ESC. The design of the exam should also be reviewed by the ESC to improve reliability and ensure it reflects the competencies set forth in the new curriculum. This should include: increasing the number of test items of medium difficulty, particularly in the mathematics test; revising free-response items to enhance discrimination in the middle of the range; and ensuring the exam includes a significant number of tasks set using authentic data and real-world contexts relevant to students. Finally, a school-based project component to the exam could be introduced. This would allow for the assessment of a wider range of competencies, such as Albania's key competencies for lifelong learning, and would also serve to strengthen teachers' classroom assessment practice.

Recommendation 2.2.2. Review the design, administration and scoring of the State Matura to improve the exam's quality. The ESC should provide more training to item-writers to ensure test items ask students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts that are relevant to young people. A broader pool of teachers should be incentivised to participate in this training in order to build capacity across the system. The quality of the examination system could be further strengthened by broadening the use of on-screen marking, which can improve test quality and efficiency, and by looking toward the implementation of computer-based assessments, whose advanced features facilitate the development of complex and innovative test items. Finally, as part of the ongoing review of the quality of national examinations, the ministry should consider eliminating the fixed pass/fail cut-score and moving either to a norm-referencing or criteria-related approach to standard-setting. This would allow Albania either to compare achievement over time (norm-referencing) or to make judgements about absolute levels of achievement with respect to national learning expectations (criteria-related).

Supporting teachers' professional growth

Teacher appraisal can be used to identify teachers' training needs and encourage them to continuously develop their competencies. However, in Albania, appraisal processes are not designed in this way. Notably, promotion within the teacher career structure is based primarily on years of service and an exam that does not authentically measure teaching competence. To support professional growth, Albania will need to revise the appraisal for promotion process and the teacher career structure to require teachers to demonstrate that

they have developed more complex knowledge and skills in order to assume new responsibilities at a higher career level. Albania will also need to improve initial teacher preparation and selection to ensure that new teachers are well-prepared and supported to become effective in their first years of teaching. To further support teachers' ongoing professional growth, Albania will need to convert the regular appraisal of teachers from a largely administrative process into one that is formative and invest more in teachers' continuous professional learning. In particular, Albania will need to build the capacity of professional learning networks, which have now been established in each local education area, to facilitate collaborative learning among teachers and help them change their practices in the classroom.

Policy issue 3.1. Encouraging teachers to improve their competencies throughout their career

Albania's teacher career structure does not encourage and reward professional growth. Teachers who are promoted to a higher qualification category receive a salary increase but they are not expected to demonstrate higher levels of competency or take on new duties. Promotion is based on years of experience, the accumulation of accredited continuous professional development credits on any topic, and an appraisal process that is primarily exam-based. The exam assesses teachers for the same minimum level of knowledge and skills throughout their careers. While this type of appraisal may be appropriate for entry to the profession, it does not meaningfully assess readiness for career advancement. Moreover, salary progression is based more on teachers' years of experience than on high performance or the assumption of additional responsibilities. The roles teachers can take on throughout their careers, like mentor or subject team head, are not remunerated. Salary progression is also relatively flat. Teachers in Albania are rewarded significantly less for their experience and efforts than teachers in OECD and neighbouring countries (OECD, 2018[10]). Albania needs to revise both the career and salary structure to make sure that they incentivise teachers to continuously develop their competencies (see Box 4). It also needs to revise the appraisal for promotion process to ensure that it adequately assesses teachers' readiness for higher responsibilities within the new revised career structure.

Box 4. Recommended actions for encouraging teachers to improve their competencies throughout their careers

Recommendation 3.1.1. Create a teacher career structure that encourages teachers to develop higher competency levels. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should develop a teacher career structure that incentivises teachers' continuous professional learning and rewards effective performance. This could take the form of a differentiated career structure consisting of two tracks: a teaching track and a leadership track. This type of career structure would help teachers better prepare for and gain more responsibility in teaching or school leadership. This differentiated career structure would also help address the current lack of structured career progression and professional learning for school principals (see Policy issue 4.4). Each track would consist of career levels connected to roles and responsibilities that increase in complexity as teachers advance in their careers. The Quality Assurance Agency should consult with teachers to revise the teaching standards to define the competencies they will need at each career level. Finally, the Quality Assurance Agency should use the revised teaching standards to inform the development and accreditation of continuous professional development opportunities. This will help

orient teachers towards training programmes to strengthen their competencies in key areas needed for their career advancement.

Recommendation 3.1.2. Revise the appraisal for promotion process to ensure teachers' readiness to take on new roles and responsibilities. Albania should create a new appraisal for promotion process that assesses whether teachers have developed the competencies they need for advancement in the new career structure recommended by this review. This appraisal process should be based on authentic sources of evidence of teachers' performance at each career level, like classroom observations, interviews and portfolios, rather than an exam. Given that the appraisal has high stakes for a teacher's career, appraisers should be independent, highly-proficient educators who are well-trained for their role. Albania should consider contracting external appraisers with high levels of competency in pedagogy to replace the local Portfolio Evaluation Commissions. Albania should also establish a new committee of teaching experts within the Quality Assurance Agency to manage the appraisal process and the training and selection of external appraisers. In the long term, Albania might consider establishing a separate professional self-regulatory body for teachers to take responsibility for the teaching standards and requirements for certification and promotion.

Recommendation 3.1.3. Plan carefully for the implementation of the revised career structure. Albania will need to develop a plan to support implementation of the new career structure, given the scale of the change and its impact on teachers. This should include revisions to the teacher salary scale. The ministry should work with teachers' unions and other relevant stakeholders to develop new salary levels that connect to different career stages to reward teachers for taking on additional responsibilities. Albania will also need to consider carefully how to place teachers in the revised career structure, including re-classifying existing teachers to the new career stages. This re-classification could be voluntary, with teachers opting to undertake the new appraisal for promotion process, or mandatory. Albania could establish a higher career level to incentivise the ongoing development of the large number of teachers who have already reached the top of the present career structure.

Policy issue 3.2. Improving the initial preparation and selection of teachers

Albania is making significant efforts to improve the initial preparation and selection of teachers. For example, the ministry is currently in discussion with initial teacher education providers to set curriculum standards for initial education. In addition, Albania has introduced more selective entry requirements to initial teacher education programmes at the bachelor's degree level to try to improve the calibre of entrants. However, other factors could mitigate efforts to attract talented candidates into the profession and ensure that they are well-prepared. New curriculum standards for initial teacher education have yet to be implemented despite entering into law in 2015, and reform efforts may not sufficiently address the quality of the practice teaching component. Candidates must wait at least five or six years before they are eligible for their first paid teaching position, given that they are required to complete a year of unpaid internship after their studies. Finally, due to an oversupply of teachers, few teaching positions are available for new graduates. Despite the oversupply, admission quotas to initial teacher education programmes have not been adjusted for some time.

While Albania is addressing initial teacher selection and preparation, efforts have not been made to develop the teaching skills and self-efficacy of newly employed teachers (see Box

5). Research suggests that effective induction supports for new teachers, like mentorship, can help improve school and teacher performance and positively impact student achievement (OECD, 2014[11]). In Albania, new teachers become responsible for their own classroom for the first time in a school environment for which they have not been prepared and without the benefit of a mentor. New teachers in rural and remote schools face particular challenges they are not sufficiently prepared or supported to address. These gaps in support limit new teachers' capacity to develop quickly and become effective in their roles.

Box 5. Recommended actions for improving the initial preparation and selection of teachers

Recommendation 3.2.1. Ensure that initial teacher education programmes develop the competencies novice teachers need at the start of their careers. To improve the quality of initial teacher preparation in Albania, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should work with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education to develop specific accreditation criteria for initial teacher education programmes. These should be based on the competencies of novice teachers articulated in revised teaching standards. As part of the accreditation process, providers should be required to demonstrate how their programmes will help students develop these competencies. New accreditation criteria should also include standards to assure the quality of the practicum, one of the most important elements of initial teacher preparation. All accreditation criteria should be clearly communicated in guidelines for providers.

Recommendation 3.2.2. Convert the internship into an induction programme for newly employed teachers. Albania should replace the internship with an induction programme for teachers in their first year of teaching. This will make entry to the profession less onerous and provide novice teachers with essential support when they assume responsibility for their first classroom. Key elements of the programme should include mentorship and other professional learning activities, such as relevant courses and seminars, to develop novice teachers' effectiveness and self-efficacy. Albania will also need to take steps to ensure that mentors can provide essential support to novice teachers. These should include mandatory mentor training and guidelines. The ministry should support mentors' and novice teachers' work together through funding for release time and clear direction to schools about how teaching loads should be reduced.

Recommendation 3.2.3. Modify the internship appraisal into a probation appraisal and an appraisal for registration that are based on evidence of teaching and learning practices. Albania should establish a new appraisal process to confirm novice teachers' readiness to move to the next stage of the new career structure as fully certified teachers (see Recommendation 3.1.1). As another appraisal with high stakes for teachers' careers, it could be similar to the new appraisal for promotion process described in Recommendation 3.1.2. Contracted external appraisers would confirm that novice teachers have met the requirements for full registration. At the same time, the school principal should conduct an in-school appraisal of novice teachers that leads to feedback. This should follow the regular appraisal process (see Recommendation 3.3.1), with some modifications, like closer monitoring to ensure that any problems novice teachers are experiencing are addressed quickly.

Recommendation 3.2.4. Revise requirements for initial certification and placement to assess the competencies of new graduates. Replacing the internship with an induction programme for newly employed teachers would have an impact on Albania's requirements for certification and placement. With this change, new graduates of initial teacher education programmes would take the state exam as a requirement for initial certification to confirm that they have attained a minimum level of competencies before entering the classroom. The ministry should work with the ESC and other partners to review and revise the exam to reliably assess these competencies. Revisions should include the addition of questions on the pre-tertiary curriculum. Other certification requirements should include obtaining a master's degree in education from an accredited initial teacher education programme and successfully completing a practicum that meets quality standards (see Recommendation 3.2.1). This will support Albania's push for greater quality assurance at the tertiary education level and also ensure that new graduates have a minimum level of practical teaching experience. In addition, the ministry should revise criteria for initial employment to ensure that they are objective and relevant to assess the competencies of newly certified recent graduates. For example, relevant criteria would relate to teaching and interpersonal competencies evidenced during candidates' studies, like assessments or references from the practicum placement. To create greater efficiency, Albania should also explore whether state exam results could be used to inform initial employment decisions instead of requiring novice teachers to also take the Teachers for Albania test.

Recommendation 3.2.5. Manage admission to initial teacher education programmes to attract talented candidates and anticipate demand from the school system. The ministry should consider working with initial teacher education programme providers to set minimum requirements for entry to the master's degree programmes that prepare future secondary teachers. The bar for entry to all initial teacher education programmes, whether for a master's degree or a bachelor's degree, should be based, in part, on labour market analysis and forward planning projections of teacher supply and demand. The ministry should review and refine its current forecasting model and labour market data. This will help the ministry to adjust admission quotas to address the oversupply of teachers for certain curriculum subjects and school levels.

Recommendation 3.2.6. Incentivise teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas and provide them with more supports to be effective. Albania's rural schools experience more staff shortages and poorer student learning outcomes than city schools. New teachers are more likely to find employment opportunities in these hard-to-staff areas. Albania should provide sufficient preparation and support to help new teachers and experienced teachers be effective in addressing the challenges these schools face. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency could expand networking opportunities for rural teachers to combat isolation. The ministry could also incentivise talented and motivated teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas. For example, the ministry should proceed with introducing incentives that were originally proposed in 2015-16, such as allowances for rent, free continuous professional development courses, and priority in transferring to their next teaching position.

Policy issue 3.3. Ensuring that regular appraisal informs teachers' professional development

Effective regular appraisal plays a crucial role in supporting teachers' ongoing professional development by providing feedback on practices and helping teachers identify their training needs (OECD, 2013[8]). In Albania, teachers' annual appraisal by their principal or deputy principal is, instead, more of an administrative process (see Box 6). For example, the

appraisal includes an assessment of the teacher's annual plan, which consists primarily of numerical targets. Teachers are required to maintain a portfolio, but it contains only administrative material rather than evidence of their teaching practice that can be used to assess their competence. Classroom observations, which principals conduct on a weekly basis, do not systematically lead to feedback to support improvements to teachers' practices. Appraisal results are also not connected to participation in continuous professional development. In addition, while the Quality Assurance Agency plans to develop guidelines to improve consistency in the implementation of the appraisal and to encourage use of the teaching standards, at present, appraisers do not receive preparation or guidance for their role.

Box 6. Recommended actions for ensuring that regular appraisal informs teachers' professional development

Recommendation 3.3.1. Make the regular appraisal process developmental. Albania should make changes to the main elements of the regular appraisal process to better support teachers' continuous professional growth. Firstly, the ministry should ensure that principals use the revised teaching standards to assess whether teachers are developing competencies to be effective at their career level (see Recommendation 3.1.1). Another key element of the appraisal process should be classroom observations that lead to feedback. The Quality Assurance Agency should develop guidance to help schools conduct these effectively. Albania should also replace teachers' annual plan with an individual development plan that encourages teachers to set goals for their development in consultation with their principal. Teachers should use a portfolio to provide evidence of the teaching and learning practices that demonstrate their work towards these goals (e.g. lesson plans, student assessments). Most importantly, Albania should ensure that regular appraisal is connected to participation in continuous professional development. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency should develop tools to help principals and teachers identify professional learning opportunities that will address teachers' needs based on their appraisal results.

Recommendation 3.3.2. Provide more guidance to teachers and school principals on how to undertake a formative appraisal. The Quality Assurance Agency should proceed with developing guidelines to ensure schools can consistently implement a formative regular appraisal process. In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency should develop tools to help principals make judgements about teachers' performance and help teachers reflect on their own practices and set goals. These could include videos that illustrate teaching practices at different stages of teachers' careers. The Quality Assurance Agency could revise its website so that schools can easily access these resources online. Principals and deputy principals, as the primary appraisers, will need sufficient preparation and guidance to conduct regular appraisals. The Quality Assurance Agency could work with the School of Directors to develop relevant training and supports for them.

Policy issue 3.4. Strengthening the collaborative professional learning activities that have the greatest impact on teachers' practices

Collaborative professional learning that includes job-embedded development opportunities is most effective at sustaining improvements to teachers' practices (Schleicher, 2011[12]). Albania has established structures to support this type of professional learning. These take the form of two groups: local professional learning networks and school-based subject teams. While these groups meet on a regular basis, Albania has not invested sufficiently in

building their capacity to develop teachers' practices (see Box 7). For example, school subject teams receive no external financial or technical support for their work. More generally, teachers' continuous professional development in Albania is underfunded. The Quality Assurance Agency's predecessor, the Education Development Institute, lacked the resources to provide an adequate amount of training to teachers on education priorities. Schools do not receive any funding to address the continuous professional development needs of their staff.

Box 7. Recommended actions for strengthening the collaborative professional learning activities that have the greatest impact on teachers' practices

Recommendation 3.4.1. Strengthen professional learning at the local and school level. Albania needs to further develop professional learning networks as a primary training resource for teachers and school subject teams. The Quality Assurance Agency should provide resources and guidance to help networks function as effective professional learning communities. Albania should establish a connection between the work of the networks and the school subject teams to ensure teachers put what they learn into practice. For example, the ministry should require school subject teams to follow up on network meetings by conducting related active learning activities, like trying out and observing new teaching strategies in the classroom. Albania will need to provide external support to subject teams to ensure that they can conduct these activities effectively. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency and local education offices should offer guidance to teams, while the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should strengthen the role of the subject team head through careful selection and preparation. The school principal should also play a key role in supporting the work of the subject teams and teachers' professional growth in general. The School of Directors should ensure that training for principals covers their role in building a collaborative work culture (see Chapter 4), while the ministry should help principals develop timetables to support teachers' professional learning.

Recommendation 3.4.2. Devote sufficient resources to teachers' continuous professional development. The ministry should provide more funding to the Quality Assurance Agency to fulfil its mandate. Resources should be sufficient to cover the development and delivery of more training for teachers on priority areas, as well as the development of new resources and tools to support professional learning and teacher appraisal, as recommended in this chapter. The ministry should also provide earmarked funding to Albania's schools to use, at their discretion, for teachers' continuous professional development.

Supporting school evaluation for improvement

A number of features of Albania's school evaluation system compare favourably to practices in OECD countries. For example, schools are required to conduct regular self-evaluations, and external school evaluations focus on assessing the quality of instruction through classroom observations. However, some aspects compromise the quality of evaluations and their use to inform school improvement. Notably, for a number of years, very few external school evaluations have been conducted. Albania re-organised its school evaluation system in 2019 with the intent of enhancing capacity to conduct external evaluations and better supporting schools to improve. But, as a result, there is now no single body that has a clear mandate for assuring the integrity of external school evaluations. New regional external evaluators will likely be tasked with helping improve the practices of schools they have evaluated, which may compromise the objectivity of the evaluation process. While schools conduct regular self-evaluations, gaps in training, tools

and data have limited their capacity to conduct them effectively. Schools view them as an additional administrative requirement rather than integral to their ongoing development.

Systemic challenges in Albania also prevent schools from using evaluation results to meaningfully improve. These include chronic underfunding and funding disparities, as well as limitations in school leadership. Consolidating responsibility for external school evaluation within one central body, providing technical supports and financial resources to schools, and developing principals' instructional leadership through the new School of Directors will be important to helping schools act upon evaluation findings.

Policy issue 4.1. Consolidating responsibility for an independent external school evaluation system focused on school quality

Several new or planned features of Albania's school evaluation system pose risks to its quality. Since the government re-organisation of 2019, responsibility for overseeing and implementing external school evaluation is split between different bodies: the Quality Assurance Agency, which manages the school evaluation framework, guidelines and training; and external school evaluators in regional education directorates who fall under the jurisdiction of the ministry's new executive arm, the General Directorate of Pre-University Education (hereby, the General Directorate). In addition, regional school evaluators will have conflicting responsibilities if they are also required to support schools in response to their evaluations. This is inconsistent with their need to remain objective and could impede their ability to develop supportive relationships with schools (see Box 8).

The Quality Assurance Agency is reportedly in the process of revising the school evaluation indicator framework and delivering training to regional evaluators. These were weaknesses in the past. The indicator framework developed in 2011 was lengthy and dense, encouraging its use as a checklist rather than an in-depth evaluation tool. Inspectors with the former State Inspectorate of Education did not use the same indicators for all full school inspections. As a result, findings could not be consistently compared across schools. Inspectors were also viewed as lacking in objectivity. They received significantly less training than their counterparts in other European countries.

Box 8. Recommended actions for consolidating responsibility for an independent external school evaluation system focused on school quality

Recommendation 4.1.1. Ensure the integrity of external school evaluations. Albania should make the Quality Assurance Agency the sole authority responsible for external school evaluation and make school evaluation a dedicated priority area within the agency's broader mandate. This would elevate school evaluation as a core governance function, help to ensure the quality of evaluations, and allow for an objective perspective on national education policies. The ministry should, among other things, provide the Quality Assurance Agency with a separate, sustainable budget for school evaluation. The Quality Assurance Agency should have direct authority over regional school evaluators as part of its mandate, including recruitment, certification and deployment. Regional evaluators should not have the conflicting mandate of both evaluating and supporting schools. To help separate these functions and ensure sufficient capacity to conduct evaluations, the Quality Assurance Agency should recruit and contract regional evaluators with relevant competencies, like highly-qualified teachers and principals, to supplement evaluation teams. The Quality Assurance Agency should provide training to evaluators that is lengthier and more practical and specific to the evaluator role than what was offered to inspectors in the past. To encourage evaluators to conduct their responsibilities with integrity, the Quality Assurance

Agency should update and enforce the former State Inspectorate of Education's ethical standards for evaluators.

Recommendation 4.1.2. Review and revise the school evaluation framework. The Quality Assurance Agency should refine its school evaluation indicator framework into a core set of roughly 10 to 15 indicators. These should cover areas that are most important to school quality, including the quality of teaching and learning; student learning progress; the quality of instructional leadership; and the school's self-evaluation practices and the extent to which they focus on teaching and learning. The indicators should also better address equity, including progress and outcomes for different student groups. The same core indicators should be used for all full school inspections to facilitate comparisons across schools. Albania might also consider supporting school evaluation and improvement by developing a national vision of what a good school looks like. To make the evaluation process more efficient and reliable, evaluators should be able to access as much information about a school as possible directly from the ministry's EMIS once it is more fully developed.

Policy issue 4.2. Ensuring that external evaluations support school improvement

Albania has lacked follow-up procedures after external school evaluations. These are essential to ensure that schools convert evaluation findings into improvements (see Box 9). For example, schools in Albania are not required to develop action plans that describe how they will improve their practices to address evaluation results. Albania plans to provide more support to schools through re-organised regional education directorates. Historically, there have been no systematic technical or financial supports in place to help schools act in response to evaluation findings. This has been a significant gap, especially given the inequities of Albania's education system. Rural schools and schools in lower socio-economic areas, in particular, lack funding to enact measures to improve teaching and learning.

Box 9. Recommended actions for ensuring that external evaluations support school improvement

Recommendation 4.2.1. Require follow-up to external school evaluation results. The Quality Assurance Agency should require all evaluated schools to develop action plans in response to external school evaluation results. Albania should also consider gradually introducing a differentiated approach to external school evaluation. This could mean evaluating schools that receive poor overall results on an external evaluation more frequently than schools that receive good or very good results. This would focus Albania's resources and attention on the schools that need the most oversight and support and reward schools that are performing well.

Recommendation 4.2.2. Provide stronger regional support for school improvement. The ministry should create positions for school support staff in the regional education directorates to work with schools to develop and implement their action plans in response to external evaluation results. School support staff could include specialists from curriculum and quality sectors and programme development sectors in the former regional education directorates/education offices, as well as other highly-proficient educators who are recruited and trained for the role. To provide support that is located even closer to

schools, the ministry should consider establishing similar roles in the new local education offices that are co-ordinated by the regional education directorates. Given financial and human resource constraints, the ministry might organise these local school support staff into teams that work with schools across several local education office areas, overseen by the regional education directorates. This would make the provision of support both efficient and responsive to schools' needs.

Recommendation 4.2.3. Target support to low-performing schools. Albania needs to provide more support to schools that are struggling to meet quality standards. For example, school support staff should provide intensive technical support to schools that receive poor results on their external school evaluations. This support could take different forms, from helping schools with budgeting to arranging training for teachers. The ministry should also consider providing targeted funding to schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas to help finance improvement measures. These technical and financial supports are more likely to have an impact if combined with a school-to-school networking initiative. Albania should pair schools with sufficient or poor inspection results with very good schools to encourage learning and improvement.

Policy issue 4.3. Helping schools conduct self-evaluation for improvement

Schools in Albania conduct annual self-evaluations, but they view the process primarily as an administrative task rather than an essential component of the school development planning cycle that is intended to inform improvements (see Box 10). The school principal leads the school development planning process but their role in school self-evaluation is more ambiguous. This contributes to the disconnect between the two processes. Schools also lack practical supports to help them conduct effective self-evaluation activities for improvement. There is no relevant training for school staff. The school self-evaluation guidelines lack information about effective practices and tools. In addition, schools do not have access to data that would allow them to compare their practices and performance with schools in similar circumstances for self-evaluation purposes. While Albania has introduced school performance cards to draw comparisons between schools using data indicators, the cards do not currently provide fair and accurate measures of school quality.

Box 10. Recommended actions for helping schools conduct self-evaluation for improvement

Recommendation 4.3.1. Help schools integrate school self-evaluation into the school development planning process. The Quality Assurance Agency should conduct research with schools to uncover why there is a disconnect between school self-evaluation and development planning. Results should inform the creation of new school self-evaluation resources and training and possible changes to school processes. One area that should be addressed is the role of the principal. Effective school self-evaluation relies on strong school leaders who can drive their staff to conduct regular self-evaluation activities and follow through with improvement measures. The Quality Assurance Agency and the ministry should clarify in all relevant guidelines and policy documents that principals should always belong to a school's self-evaluation team and be involved in conducting its core activities. The School of Directors should describe the principal's role in leading school self-evaluation in revised school leadership standards and ensure that the standards are used to inform principal certification, recruitment, appraisal and training.

Recommendation 4.3.2. Build capacity for school self-evaluation. Schools in Albania need resources and training to help them conduct self-evaluations effectively. The Quality Assurance Agency should revise the school self-evaluation guidelines to be more practical and supportive. For example, the guidelines should help schools focus on a few simple self-evaluation questions and core indicators. Schools could also share self-evaluation tools and practices on a new online platform. The Quality Assurance Agency should work with the School of Directors to develop mandatory school self-evaluation training for principals. Training should also be offered to school staff. In addition, Albania should consider offering schools external support for self-evaluation, like coaching from the school support staff described above.

Recommendation 4.3.2. Support schools to make better use of data. The ESC should provide schools with granular data from national exams and assessments to help schools compare their students' results and evaluate their own instructional practices. To encourage schools to use the data in the school performance card for their own development, the ministry should discontinue its use to publicly rank schools. Instead, the school performance card should be an internal self-evaluation tool. It could take the form of an electronic template pre-filled with national and regional benchmarks to which schools can add their own data. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should work closely with the General Directorate and the ESC to improve the school performance card indicators. This process should ensure that indicators are limited to those that are relevant to school quality and address contextual factors that impact performance.

Data in the EMIS, once further developed, should be used to populate the cards to reduce the reporting burden on schools. The ministry and ESC should create a school portal or "view" in the EMIS so that schools have easy access to this data. The portal should allow schools to benchmark their performance against schools with similar characteristics. This will provide a fair comparison of like schools and reveal whether schools with similar backgrounds are obtaining different outcomes.

Policy issue 4.4. Supporting school-level capacity for improvement

A lack of financial resources prevent schools in Albania from acting upon external and school self-evaluations (see Box 11). Schools are chronically underfunded and central funding is not distributed equitably. Schools in low socio-economic areas, in particular, struggle to meet their basic needs and are not in a position to finance improvement measures.

Limited school leadership capacity has also hindered school improvement (see Box 11). School leadership has been viewed as a temporary administrative role for teachers in Albania. For example, principals maintain a teaching load and they often return to teaching after short periods as school leaders. They have not been encouraged to develop instructional leadership competencies to shape teaching and learning in their schools. Recognising the need for stronger school leaders, Albania has established a School of Directors to develop measures like mandatory pre-service training and certification procedures.

Box 11. Recommended actions for supporting school-level capacity for improvement

Recommendation 4.4.1. Provide schools with sufficient financial resources, including school improvement funding. To reduce inequities in funding distribution, the ministry should adjust how schools are funded to take into account contextual variables that affect schools' needs. Regional and local education units should be required to use a formula to distribute funds to schools. To address schools' lack of basic necessities, like heating, the ministry should work with municipalities to review the process of funding school building maintenance costs, which are the responsibility of local government. The ministry might consider creating an infrastructure fund for schools when municipal funding is insufficient. The ministry should also consider introducing a discretionary grant programme to help schools implement improvement activities. Priority could be given to schools that receive poor external school evaluation results and are located in low socio-economic areas.

Recommendation 4.4.2. Develop the role of the principal as instructional leader. Developing a cadre of strong school leaders is an important, long-term investment. As a priority, the School of Directors should ensure that new pre-service training for principals is of high quality. For example, it should be practical and cover all essential school leadership areas, including instructional leadership. To attract educators to the principal role, the training should be free-of-charge or subsidised. Another priority should be abolishing principals' teaching load. Albania should consider introducing a new teacher career structure that includes a leadership track (see Chapter 3) to encourage prospective and practising principals to develop their leadership skills.A feature of the leadership track should be new career levels and associated salary increases specifically for principals. Progression along this track should be based on an objective appraisal of principals' performance as school leaders. This would reward principals for developing leadership competencies; currently, they can only obtain salary increases based on their work as teachers. Albania should also develop a more formative annual appraisal process and introduce collaborative professional learning opportunities, like mentoring and networking, to strengthen principals' skills.

Strengthening capacity to evaluate system performance

System evaluation is central to improving educational performance. It holds the government and other stakeholders accountable for meeting national goals and provides the information needed to develop effective policies. Albania has started to establish some of the components integral to system evaluation. For example, the ESC is developing a modern EMIS, called Socrates, which by 2020 will store information related to students, teachers, curriculum and schools in pre-tertiary education.

Nevertheless, progress in developing system evaluation capabilities in Albania is uneven and the government demand for evidence to inform education policy is generally low. As a result, strategies and polices are often set without sufficient analysis, regular monitoring and reporting on progress is limited, and capacity for fulfilling these important functions is relatively weak. Building stronger demand for information and analysis within government, and developing the institutional capacity and procedures to support a culture of system evaluation, will be important to ensuring the use of evidence to support strategic planning and help Albania prioritise and achieve national education goals.

Policy issue 5.1. Establishing the processes and capacity needed to conduct system evaluation

Compared to practices in OECD and other European countries, Albania's culture of monitoring, evaluation and research in the education system is underdeveloped. Prior to 2017, there was no agency or unit responsible for monitoring the education system. Today, this responsibility is distributed across different bodies that face significant capacity constraints and have limited monitoring and evaluation experience. Without clearer processes and stronger capacity for system evaluation (see Box 12), it will be difficult for Albania to promote a culture of regular evaluation and strategic learning within its education sector.

Box 12. Recommended actions for establishing the processes and capacity needed to conduct system evaluation

Recommendation 5.1.1. Integrate evaluation processes into the future strategy.

Albania is starting to develop a new national education strategy, which presents an opportunity to integrate evaluation more centrally into planning and policy-making processes. While the current strategy was built on an analysis of sector performance and a broad consultation process, this resulted in a long list of aspirations and actions with no clear set of priorities. Considering Albania's limited education budget, it is crucial the government direct reform efforts to where they will have the greatest impact.This review recommends that Albania prioritise strategic issues, set clear goals and develop implementation plans that are detailed and feasible to help strengthen results-oriented and accountable planning processes. This will also require strong system evaluation tools, such as a reliable EMIS system (see Policy Issue 2), to provide reliable and timely data that can inform policy decisions and monitor progress.

Recommendation 5.1.2. Develop the capacity to conduct system evaluation. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity requires well-co-ordinated evaluation bodies that are objective, credible and have sufficient resources and staff with the relevant skills needed to conduct rigorous and reliable analysis. In Albania, overall capacity for evaluation remains underdeveloped and the recent re-organisation of education agencies has led to confusion about the roles different actors play in monitoring and evaluating system performance. Albania should clearly define the evaluation roles of the new Quality Assurance Agency to avoid duplication with the ministry's Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics sector and ensure these bodies have the financial and human resources they need to fulfil their respective mandates. Albania should also support the system evaluation capacity of the General Directorate and its four regional directorates. This is especially important considering that regional offices are increasingly responsible for ensuring the quality and functioning of schools in their jurisdiction, which requires being able to use a range of evidence (MoESY, 2018[13]).

Recommendation 5.1.3. Report on the quality of education regularly and promote the use of evidence to inform policy-making. Regular reporting on the state of the education system is important to keep policy makers, education practitioners and the general public informed and keep the government accountable for its commitments (OECD, 2013[8]). Different agencies and units in the Albanian ministry publish annual reports on their work, which provides valuable sources of information. However, these different strands are not pulled together on a regular basis to communicate how the

education system is performing as a whole. Albania's Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics sector should task the Quality Assurance Agency to publish a regular report on the state of the education system and ensure that information about the sector is available in timely, relevant and accessible forms. This will not only hold the central government and regional education offices accountable for educational quality but also enable these actors to use evidence to inform their work. Over time, disseminating quality evaluation information can help the Albanian government and education community become more sophisticated and demanding consumers of evidence.

Policy issue 5.2. Modernising the education management information system

Integrated and comprehensive EMIS systems are widespread in OECD and European countries. These systems are especially effective because they not only collect and store data but also allow users to analyse data and help disseminate information about education inputs, processes and outcomes (Abdul-Hamid, 2014[14]). In Albania, current processes for collecting and managing information about the education sector are outdated and not accessible from a unified source. The forthcoming Socrates system (EMIS) represents an important step towards modernising the country's education data by combining administrative information with learning outcomes and allowing schools to enter data directly, replacing the current process of gathering school-level data through emails and Excel files. The development and implementation of Socrates has been slow and poorly co-ordinated.Albania should prioritise the finalisation and implementation of Socrates and build in analytical and reporting functions to ensure this system becomes an effective and useful evaluation tool (see Box 13).

Box 13. Recommended actions for modernising the education management information system

Recommendation 5.2.1. Address gaps in the development of Socrates and establish it as the central source of education data. The Socrates system is an excellent opportunity for Albania to modernise the collection, management and use of education data. However, there are important gaps in current plans for Socrates' development, such as the lack of protocols for defining, collecting and verifying data and limited staff capacity to fully implement this tool. Albania should establish a formal data dictionary to ensure that all education actors have a shared understanding of data definitions and report information correctly. These data protocols should be accompanied by quality assurance procedures to help build trust in Socrates as a reliable and central source of information. While the ESC currently has the infrastructure and technical capacity to develop Socrates, Albania should consider positioning the EMIS closer within the ministry's Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics sector, which is closer to the central leadership. This would reinforce the sector's mandate to monitor the education system and would help ensure that Socrates develops into a responsive tool that meets the data needs of policy makers.

Recommendation 5.2.2. Develop Socrates into a functional tool to inform decision-making. While current plans for developing Socrates include important innovations that will help link education databases and facilitate multi-dimensional analysis, more could be done to support user-friendly access to data and its use to inform education policy. In particular, Albania should reconsider the decision to use a unique student identifier instead of a civil identification number. There are several advantages to using civil identification numbers because they connect education data with other sectors, such as the

population register, and can reduce the burden and errors of data entry, as information can be retrieved automatically. This would allow Albania to examine important questions, such as the extent to which the school curriculum prepares students for success in the workforce. The ministry could also modernise the way data is disseminated so that users within and external to the government can more easily use this information to inform education policy and practice. For example, public and private dashboards with data visualisation features would allow users to make customised comparisons, generate charts and export data for further analysis.

Recommendation 5.2.3. Develop the national indicator framework to guide the development of Socrates. Albania's current education strategy includes a national indicator framework that identifies data sources related to pre-tertiary education. However, there are currently no indicators related to student learning and some of the indicators are not clearly defined. Albania should develop the national indicator framework to align with the new strategy and draw more fully on information from across the system, especially student learning outcomes. Mapping the indicator framework against available sources of information can help identify information gaps and signal a need for Socrates to improve data collection in order to better measure progress. This can improve accountability for system performance and help co-ordinate policy efforts.

Policy issue 5.3. Ensuring the national assessment supports system goals

National assessments that provide regular and reliable data on student learning outcomes can inform education policy, support strategic planning and help drive system improvement (OECD, 2013[8]). Following a pilot sample-based assessment for Grades 3 and 5 in 2014-15, the Albanian ministry chose to implement the VANAF as an annual census-based assessment for all students in Grade 5 and forgo a national assessment for lower grades. While the VANAF represents a positive feature of Albania's infrastructure for system evaluation, the lack of standardised marking and moderation processes means that results are not comparable nationally. As a result, Albania currently does not have a reliable external measure of learning outcomes until students take the PISA assessment at age 15. While data from TIMSS and PIRLS will soon be available to help monitor learning outcomes in Grade 4, international assessments cannot measure how well students are meeting the national curriculum standards. The ministry and ESC should align the design and implementation of the VANAF to ensure it supports the monitoring and achievement of national education goals (see Box 14).

Once reliable assessment instruments have been established, the ministry will need to work with the ESC to improve the way in which assessment results are disseminated (see Box 14). Albania's current practice of producing a single national report that ranks schools based on their aggregate results does not maximise the potential benefits of having a census-based assessment and can have negative effects on teacher and school behaviour. Research shows that having externally validated measures of learning for each student can help schools identify and address achievement gaps and act as a reference for teachers' classroom marking, but international evidence likewise highlights the importance of ensuring the fair interpretation and careful use of the data (OECD, 2013[8]). Albania's lack of contextualised comparisons and targeted reporting structures carries risks of false inferences and represents a missed opportunity to leverage the formative potential of this important evaluation tool.

Box 14. Recommended actions for ensuring the national assessment supports system goals

Recommendation 5.3.1. Align the national assessment with its stated purpose of system monitoring. The stated purpose of the VANAF is to help upgrade the skills, knowledge and know-how of students; monitor and control the implementation of the curriculum; and inform students, parents and educational institutions about student achievements (MoESY, 2018[13]). While these objectives are in line with the purpose of national assessments in many OECD and EU countries, the current design and marking of the VANAF do not support such broad purposes. This review recommends that Albania maintain the VANAF in Grade 5 but set a realistic timetable for introducing a census-based assessment in Grade 3. This would help identify issues in students' learning before they become problematic and help track progress overtime. The value of results for policy-making could be enhanced by background questionnaires that capture more of the contextual factors that influence student learning, such as student socio-economic background and school structure (i.e. multi-grade schools). This review also recommends that Albania introduce the same rigorous external marking or moderation procedures for its national assessments as is standard practice in most OECD countries and is needed if the data are to be used for monitoring and comparison. Concretely, this means transferring the responsibility of marking from local education offices to the ESC and providing the resources needed to validate the consistency of marking across the country.

Recommendation 5.3.2. Improve the dissemination of national assessment results to support system goals. The ESC prepares an annual national report on VANAF results that provides a description of achievement results, trend data and correlations by gender, school type and geographic location. However, the report, which is the only tool used to communicate results with policy makers, educators and the public, also ranks all schools according to aggregate student scores without any contextualised information. This is problematic since the data generated from the VANAF is not comparable across the country and can also lead to the most advantaged schools and students continually being considered the most effective. Instead of ranking schools based on aggregate results, the ministry and ESC should report school-level results alongside more relevant and contextualised performance benchmarks. For example, it would be more appropriate to compare a school's national assessment results to other schools that are located in the same local education office, have similar student populations (i.e. students with similar socio-economic backgrounds) or have similar structures (i.e. compare multi-grade schools with each other). Albania could also optimise the formative potential of the VANAF by creating tailored reports for different audiences, such as parents, teachers, schools and the general public. Importantly, results should be disseminated in a way that avoids potentially negative consequences, such as attaching stakes or negative consequences to the assessment.

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Chapter 1. The Albanian education system

Since the 2000s, Albania has improved access to education and raised learning outcomes. However, educational attainment and performance continue to be strongly influenced by students' background characteristics. Learning levels remain among the lowest in Europe. This reflects systemic challenges of low funding, unstable governance and limited capacity. Placing student learning at the centre of Albania's evaluation and assessment processes can help to focus the system onto raising standards for all.

Introduction

Albania has made significant progress in developing a multi-party democracy and open market economy, evolving from one of the poorest countries in Europe into an increasingly competitive, upper-middle income economy. As part of this process, Albania has embarked on significant education reforms such as the decentralisation of school governance and the introduction of a competency-based curriculum. This has contributed to improvement across key education indicators. For example, access to compulsory education has expanded in recent years, and student performance on international surveys has trended upward over several cycles. However, a large share of Albanian students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies. Equity is also a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes according to ethnic background and geographical region. This limits the employment and life chances of many individuals and risks holding back national development. This review looks at how the education evaluation and assessment system can be strengthened to support more effective learning and better outcomes for all students.

National context

Political and economic context

Transparency and accountability in public administration are improving, but progress has been hindered by the political landscape

Albania has introduced a series of important public administration and anti-corruption reforms to improve efficiency and transparency in governance structures and processes. This includes the Inter-sectoral Anti-corruption Strategy 2015-2020, which has sought to eliminate corruption in public administration across all public services (Ministry of Justice, 2015[1]). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean, showed a statistically significant increase of five points for Albania between 2013 and 2018. However, at 36 points, this remains slightly below other Western Balkans countries and markedly behind all EU countries (Transparency International, 2018[2]).

Strengthening the independence and transparency of public administration is important for improving Albania's education system. Albania has made some efforts to address the politicisation of appointment decisions, for example by introducing open competitions for the appointment of principals to schools (see Chapter 4). However, at present, the selection of school principals, as well as the appointment of staff at key educational agencies reportedly remain subject to political influence. It will be important for Albania to ensure appointment is based on merit, and that the best candidates with demonstrated competence and experience are selected and retained in these positions (see Chapter 4).

Economic growth is expected to continue, but further progress is needed to reduce poverty

Over the last three decades, Albania has transitioned from one of the poorest and most isolated countries in Europe to an upper-middle-income country, NATO member and candidate for European Union membership. Annual GDP growth in Albania was 4.1% in 2018, behind only Montenegro (5.1%) and Serbia (4.4%) in the Western Balkans and higher than the OECD and EU averages of 2.2% and 2.0% respectively (The World Bank, 2019[3]). While slowing, economic growth is projected to remain at about 3.7% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2019[4]).

Sustained growth has contributed to a decline in poverty. In 2002, 54% of the Albanian population was living on less than USD 5.5 (in 2011 purchasing power parity) a day. By 2018, this had fallen to an estimated 35%, a notable drop, though still the highest rate among Western Balkan countries (The World Bank, 2019[5]).

Unemployment is high and many Albanians have low skills

Albania continues to face high rates of unemployment, especially among its youth population. In 2018, the country's unemployment rate stood at 13.9%, a rate on par with Serbia (13.5%), lower than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (20.8%), Montenegro (15.5%) and North Macedonia (21.6%), but significantly higher than the EU (6.8%) and OECD (5.3%) averages (The World Bank, 2019[3]). The unemployment rate among 15-24 year-olds was 31.0%, significantly higher than the respective EU and OECD averages of 17.1% and 11.9%. The share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is also high. As of 2015, 32.8% of Albanian youth were NEET, the highest percentage among Western Balkan countries and significantly higher than the rate in the EU (12.0%) and OECD (14.2%) countries.

While international surveys signal that Albania's global competitiveness has risen in recent years and is now slightly above that of other Western Balkan countries, many Albanians are employed in low-skilled and low-productivity jobs, particularly in the agriculture sector (WEF, 2017[6]; European Commission, 2018[7]). These low-skilled individuals face an increased risk of becoming poor or being excluded from the labour market. In order to ensure Albanians have the skills needed to be employed, Albania's National Employment and Skills Strategy has called for investments in vocational education and training (VET) and human capital development more broadly (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014[8]). Closing skills gaps is particularly important for attracting foreign direct investment as Albania looks toward EU accession (The World Bank, 2019[5]).

Social context

Demographic changes and migration flows contribute to disparities by geography

Albania is facing a general population decline as a result of a declining fertility rate and negative net migration (INSTAT, 2018[9]). The share of the Albanian population that was 15 years old decreased by about 2 percentage points between 2013 and 2017 and is expected to decline through 2060 (INSTAT, 2018[10]). This is reflected in the downward trend in the number of students enrolled in basic education, public and private combined, which decreased by 27% between 2006-2007 and 2016-2017.

At the same time, net migration continues to be negative, with more people leaving than entering the country. In 2013, the stock of emigrants was equal to 43.6% of the population residing in Albania (King and Gëdeshi, 2019[11]). While emigration has significantly declined in recent years, Albania's net migration rate in 2017 was -3.3%, much lower than in other Western Balkan countries with available data such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (-0.4%), North Macedonia (-0.5%) and Serbia (0.0%) (CIA, 2019[12]). The Migration Policy Institute suggests that the pursuit of education and better career opportunities are among the key factors driving Albania's international migration outflows (Barjaba and Barjaba, 2015[13]). Indeed, about 31% of persons with a tertiary level of education born in Albania lived outside the country in 2011 (King and Gëdeshi, 2019[11]).

Demographic changes and migration are also contributing to changes in the geographic distribution of people within the country. Some areas in Albania are facing severe depopulation while others are experiencing large-scale urbanisation (Betti et al., 2018[14]).

Albania's rural population declined by 2.4% in 2017, faster than the decline in other Western Balkan countries and much faster than the average 0.4% decline across the OECD and 0.7% decline in the EU (The World Bank, 2019[3]). In 2018, about 40% of the Albanian population lived in a rural area, as compared to about 22% on average in the OECD (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019[15]).

Patterns of poverty have also been influenced by migration flows. According to the latest national data, absolute poverty increased between 2008 and 2012 in the coastal region (12.7% to 17.7%), in the central region (10.7% to 12.6%) and in Tirana (8.8% to 12.1%), while declining in the mountain region (25.9% to 15.1%) (INSTAT, 2015[16]). The large drop in the poverty rate in the mountain region is likely due to population shifts and internal migration out of the mountain region, particularly rural areas (INSTAT, 2015[16]; Betti et al., 2018[14]). The 2011 census in Albania revealed that for the first time there were more people living in urban (53.5%) than in rural (46.5%) areas, and urban poverty likely increased as a result, with non-working poor being concentrated in rural areas (INSTAT, 2012[17]; Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014[8]).

Albania is home to many ethnic and linguistic minorities, for whom socio-economic outcomes tend to be much lower than for the majority ethnic Albanian population

Data from the most recent national census (2011) indicate ethnic Albanians comprised 82.6% of the total population. Greeks made up 0.9% of the population and other groups of North Macedonian, Montenegrin, Aromanian, Roma and Egyptian origin comprised about 1%; the ethnic and cultural affiliation of 15.5% of the population was unspecified (INSTAT, 2012[17]).

Roma and Balkan Egyptians tend to have lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment and lower employment outcomes than ethnic Albanians. For example, while 80% of ethnic Albanians have achieved at least lower secondary education, this share is only 49% among Balkan Egyptians and 21% among Roma (United Nations, 2015[18]).

In recent years, Albania has adopted several inter-ministerial strategies and action plans to support the socio-economic inclusion of Roma, Balkan Egyptian and other vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities. For example, the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2015-2020 (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2015[19]) and the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities 2016-2020 (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016[20]) aim to remove barriers to public services and promote the integration of these marginalised groups into broader Albanian society.

Governance, funding and structure of the education system

Governance of the education system

The Pre-University Education Strategy sets policy priorities, but planning and implementation capacity are relatively weak

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) steered the preparation of Albania's current Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020 (hereby, the strategy), which was adopted in 2016 (see Box 1.1). The strategy took one year to develop and underwent an extensive public consultation. It delineates a vision for the future and an implementation plan complete with specific activities, assigned responsibilities and deadlines for implementing change. However, implementation has been relatively weak, in

part because individual agencies develop their own work plans, which undermines sector-wide planning. In addition, indicators and targets found in the strategy are not aligned with each other, which diminishes the strategy's ability to drive system improvement. Albania is currently discussing the future of the strategy, which expires in 2020. This presents an opportunity to take stock of strengths and weaknesses in the education system and to integrate evaluation processes into the new strategy (see Chapter 5).

Box 1.1. Policy Priorities of the Albanian Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020

In 2016, Albania adopted the national Pre-University Education Development Strategy for 2014-2020. It delineates seven principles for reform that guided the drafting of the strategy:

- Qualitative and Inclusive Education: Provide students with the right to quality education, equal opportunities to be educated and the right to be different.
- Uniform Education System: As far as possible, learning conditions in educational institutions should be comparable to the regional and European educational systems.
- Education for Life: Create the conditions for students to build new knowledge and competences that enable them to respond to the country's development and changes in the labour market.
- Quality Assurance of Standards Achievement: The provision of pre-university education is based on educational standards and both internal and external evaluations.
- Decentralisation: Creates conditions for centralised management of a decentralised education system by fostering the autonomy of educational institutions.
- Accountability and Transparency: Increase the legal framework, mechanisms and procedures needed for accountability and transparency.
- Community Support: Provide financial support from all possible sources of society to both public and private pre-university education institutions.

The strategy also sets the policy priorities for education. For each priority, the strategy sets forth expected results and main activities that will be undertaken. The four priorities are:

- Improving the governance, leadership and management capacities of pre-university education system resources.
- Quality and inclusive learning.
- Quality assurance based on comparable standards with EU countries.
- Modern teacher training and development.

Source: MoESY (2016[21]) *Srategjisë së Zhvillimit të Arsimit Parauniversitar, për Periudhën* 2014–2020 [Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020], https://qbz.gov.al/ (accessed on 16 January 2020).

The ministry relies on local representatives to implement national policies

The ministry plays a strategic role in making decisions related to education policy and is responsible for the overall development, co-ordination and administration of education at the national level. In addition to pre-tertiary education, the ministry is in charge of higher education, youth issues, sports development and scientific research. Vocational education is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. Due to the low percentage of enrolment vocational education schools represent, they are not covered in this review.

As in many OECD countries, Albania has deconcentrated control of its education system. Regional education directorates and education offices, subordinate to the ministry, were created in 2003 to support the implementation of national education policies in schools. In 2019, service delivery was further deconcentrated at regional level in order to bring services closer to schools. Under this reform, regional directorates are now also responsible for school external evaluation, and they are under the oversight of the General Directorate for Pre-University Education (see below).

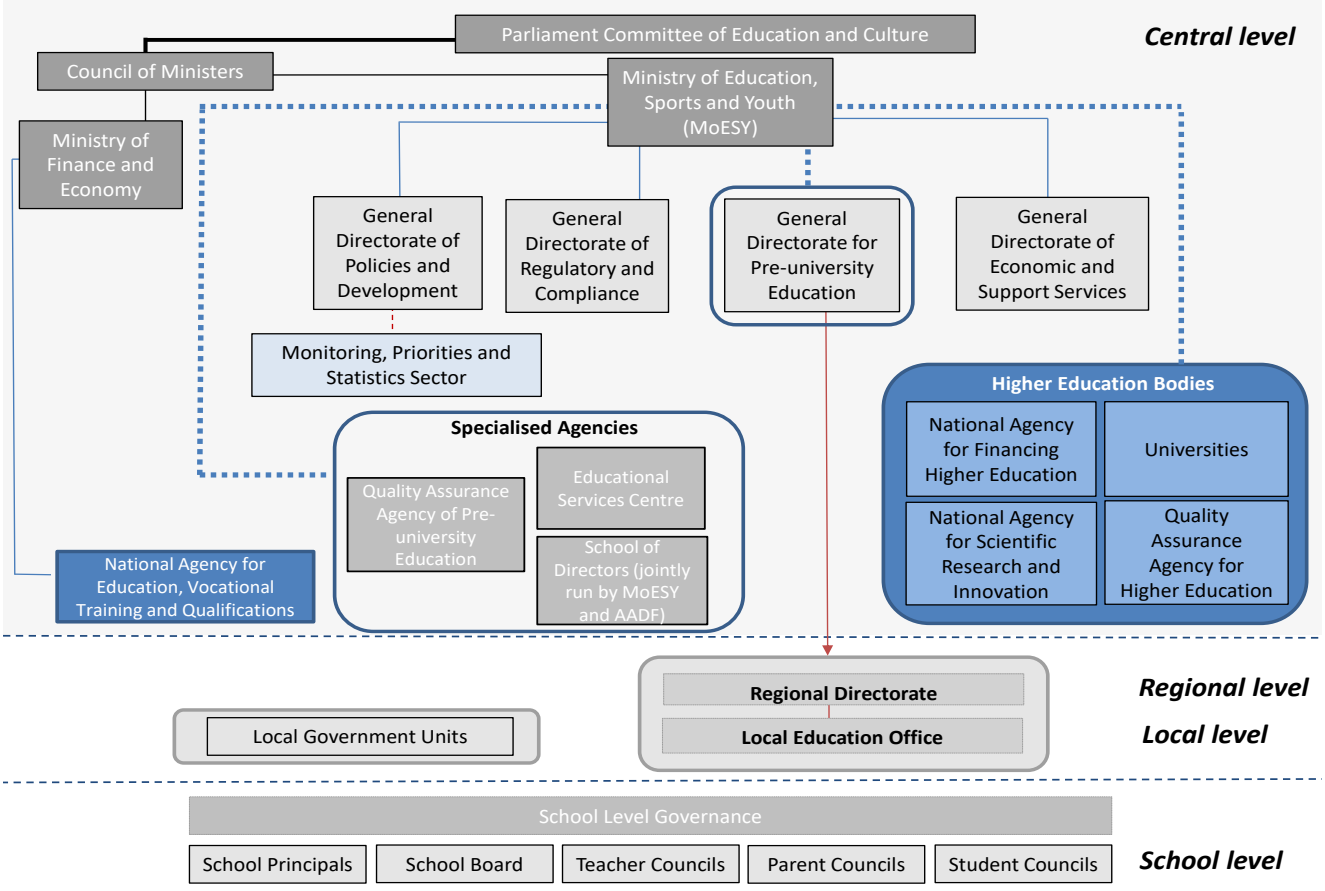
The responsibilities of specialised agencies are evolving

Albania has three specialised public agencies related to pre-tertiary education that are accountable to the ministry (see Figure 1.1) (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonomi, 2019[22]):

- The Education Development Institute and the State Education Inspectorate, established in 2010 and 2013 respectively, merged in 2019 to form the **Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education** (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency). There are currently about 56 employees at the Quality Assurance Agency. This new agency is responsible for standard setting and programme design, covering areas such as teaching standards, learning standards, curriculum design and teaching preparation. In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency is responsible for designing and revising the framework for school evaluation, defining guidelines for school external evaluation and school self-evaluation and providing training to inspectors for school external evaluation. While the school inspection function, previously held by the State Education Inspectorate, is now being fulfilled by the General Directorate for Pre-University Education, the Quality Assurance Agency has a mandate to conduct risk-based assessments of pre-tertiary education providers. The Quality Assurance Agency also has a new mandate for monitoring the performance of the education system.
- The **General Directorate for Pre-University Education,** established in 2019, is an executive arm of the ministry. It coordinates the work of four regional directorates that are tasked with managing the delivery of services to schools. This includes: co-ordinating professional development and curriculum implementation; inspecting and evaluating schools; managing school funding and the allocation of human resources; supporting the administration of the Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF) and the National Basic Education Exam; and collecting and managing educational data. Each regional directorate has 12 to 16 local education offices (51 total) that report to them and serve as liaisons with schools. Inspectors are part of the regional directorates and report to the General Director. Albania is considering making inspectors responsible for supporting schools in response to their evaluation, which carries significant risk in terms of independence and impartiality (see Chapter 4).
- The **Educational Services Centre (ESC)** was established in 2015, assuming many of the functions of its predecessor, the National Exam Agency, and before that, the Education Centre for Assessment and Examination. The ESC is responsible for developing, administering and analysing the results of national and international assessments. The ESC also publishes reports on assessment results, contributes to the drafting of laws and bylaws relevant to its operations and manages Albania's four education databases. Albania is currently piloting an education management information system (EMIS), and it is currently envisaged that the ESC will manage the platform once it is complete. There are 44 employees at the ESC, most of whom have a Master's of Science degree. While the ESC has staff with psychometric

expertise and experience, it has limited human and financial resources. As a result, the ESC relies on around 2,000 external experts each year to realise the scope of its mandated activities.

Figure 1.1. Structure of education governance in Albania



Note: This figure provides a broad overview of the governance structure in Albania but does not include all governance units and sub-units. It is not the official organigram of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. AADF = Albanian-American Development Foundation.
Adapted from: MoESY (2018[23]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania,* Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Tirana; Wort, M., Pupovci, D. and Ikonomi, E. (2019[22]), *Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020*, https://www.unicef.org/albania/reports/appraisal-pre-university-education-strategy-2014-2020 (accessed on 13 January 2020).

Albania's curriculum and assessment frameworks orient teaching and learning, and schools have flexibility on implementation

Albania's current curriculum framework, published in 2014, defines the goals, general principles, educational levels, crosscutting key competencies and subject areas of the pre-tertiary education system. It sets out a constructivist and student-centred approach to teaching and learning and describes the methods teachers should be using in their classrooms, such as formative assessment and portfolio. It sets forth the key competencies for lifelong learning that all students are expected to achieve by the end of upper secondary education, informed by the EU's 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO, 2017[24]).

With approval from their local education institutions, schools can draft their own curriculum on the basis of the curriculum framework and standards approved by the ministry. Schools in Albania have much greater flexibility in making decisions about curriculum than schools in other Western Balkans countries. Data from OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 show that about 79% of the responsibility for curriculum lies at the school level (either teachers, principals or school boards), a percentage similar to the OECD on average (73%) and much higher than in Montenegro (34%), North Macedonia (41%) and Croatia (44%) (OECD, 2016[25]).

Albania's assessment framework builds on the curriculum framework. The framework defines policies and practices such as portfolio assessment, formative assessment and continuous assessment, though these definitions sometimes lack clarity and concreteness (see Chapter 2). The framework also describes the role of teachers vis-à-vis assessment, including working collaboratively with other teachers, as well as the role and responsibilities of other stakeholders such as school administrators. However, the implementation of many of the processes and activities described in the framework is left to schools, regional directorates and local education offices, with little additional support or concrete guidance at the national level.

School autonomy has grown but school planning and self-evaluation remains weak

As part of its broader decentralisation efforts, Albania has taken steps to increase school autonomy, which is one of the general principles of the National Education Law (MoESY, 2012[26]). School-level governance in Albania involves school principals along with their deputies and school boards. According to Albanian law, each school must also have its own teacher, parent and student councils that help shape policies at the school level. For example, schools now play an important role in hiring and dismissing teachers and selecting textbooks. However, the ministry, regional directorates and local education offices continue to make all decisions related to financial resources, and schools receive no discretionary funding.

The ability of schools to reflect on their own policies and practices is important for making effective use of school resources, lack of discretionary financial resources notwithstanding. However, the capacity for school planning and self-evaluation remains weak in Albanian schools. Despite guidelines and methodological documents developed by the ministry and the defunct State Education Inspectorate (see above), not all schools understand the legal obligation of conducting self-evaluations and many view this task as a formal bureaucratic exercise. Prior to the merger between the State Education Inspectorate and the Education Development Institute, this was particularly problematic because the limited capacity of the State Education Inspectorate meant that schools would go several years without undergoing an evaluation. Albania is currently looking to address this lack of capacity (see Chapter 4).

Funding of the education system

Spending on education is low

Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP in 2016 in Albania (4.0%) was similar to the percentage in Serbia (3.9%) but lower than on average in the OECD (5.4%) and the EU (5.1%) (UIS, 2020[27]). The share of total government expenditure in 2016 allocated to education in Albania (13.6%) was higher than in Serbia (8.7%) and on average in OECD countries (13.2%) and in the EU (11.8%). These expenditure rates have generally been

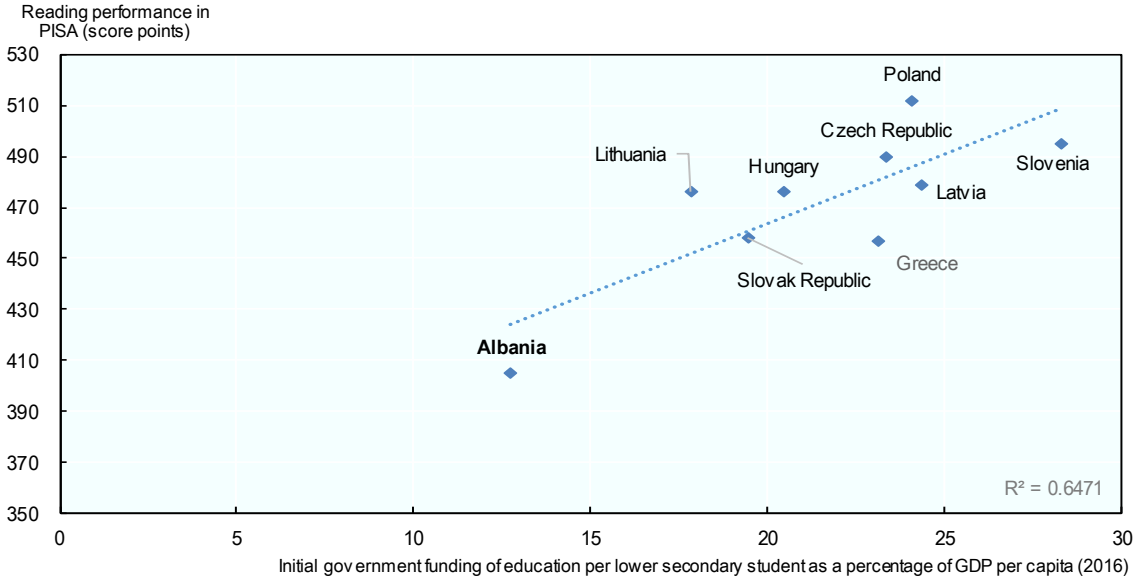
increasing in Albania over the last two decades and peaked in 2016, the most recent year for which there is international data.

In terms of spending by education levels, spending on primary education in Albania (1.8% of GDP) is on par with neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans but higher than on average in the OECD (1.4% of GDP) and the EU (1.3% of GDP) (OECD, 2018[28]). This leaves limited financial resources for other areas of the education system. In particular, at the secondary education level, Albania spends about 0.4% of GDP, much less than on average in the OECD and EU (2.0% of GDP each).

Spending on education in Albania is inadequate

Data from PISA indicate that for countries where spending per student is below a certain threshold[1], higher expenditure is associated with higher student outcomes (OECD, 2016[25]). When comparing expenditure per lower secondary student in Albania to other European and OECD countries, the data suggest that Albania remains in a position of low spending and low results (see Figure 4). While there is scope for better use of resources, Albania will find it difficult to achieve significant gains in learning outcomes without higher investment.

Figure 1.2. PISA 2018 results and government expenditure on lower secondary education



Note: Internationally comparable data on cumulative expenditure per student for Albania is unavailable.
Source: UIS (2020[27]) *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/ (accessed on 16 January 2020); OECD (2019[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

Funding to schools is allocated centrally and managed at the regional and local levels

Public pre-tertiary education in Albania is funded primarily through central funds, with additional contributions from local funds and smaller contributions in the form of donations, sponsorships and revenues generated by educational institutions. Funds from the ministry's budget flow to regional directorate and local education office budget accounts, while additional central funding streams for education are administered by local government units (e.g. communes, municipalities). Regional directorate and local

education office budgets cover the costs of delivering most educational services (e.g. school teaching staff salaries). Local government units (LGUs) are responsible for functions related to construction, infrastructure, maintenance and utilities, and these responsibilities have recently been expanded (see below).

Challenges associated with the allocation of funds to regional and local entities include a lack of clarity in competences and responsibilities between local and central governments and an insufficient level of funding directed at regional directorates, local education offices and LGUs in order to fulfil their functions. Many of these entities also lack the financial management capacities, and human resources more broadly, to manage funds and deliver decentralised services (Haxhimali, 2019[30]; MoESY, 2018[23]).

Funding is not targeted toward tackling disparities

While decentralisation has provided some budget flexibility to regional directorates, local education offices and LGUs, funding is not clearly targeted toward mitigating the impact of factors known to affect student outcomes such as socio-economic disadvantage and high concentrations of disadvantage within schools (OECD, 2016[31]). For example, among the 12 prefectures in Albania, Gjirokastër had the lowest poverty rate (10.6% in 2012) yet the highest average annual expenditure per student in 2011 (MoESY, 2018[23]; INSTAT, 2015[16]).

Funding formulas provide an effective means to provide differential funding based on need and thereby help redress disparities (OECD, 2017[32]). In Albania, while provisions in the law call for the pre-tertiary budget to be based on a per-pupil formula, this has not yet been implemented (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonomi, 2019[22]). Currently, there is no funding formula used for the allocation of ministry funds to regional directorates/local education offices. Furthermore, regional directorates/local education offices choose how to allocate funds among the schools they manage without clear guidelines or orientation. For example, the ministry designates the number of employees a given local education office will be able to hire, without providing guidance on the number of teachers that should be hired per school (Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania, 2018[33]). There is no clear process for making allocations based on disparities among students, and schools do not have the budget autonomy needed to allocate their own funds based on school needs (see Chapter 4).

A portion of central funds, known as unconditional transfers, allocated to LGUs is calculated based on a formula-based system created in 2002. These transfers were designed to help close gaps between LGUs' independently generated revenue and the costs of exercising their functions, which in the area of education were recently expanded to include staffing of pre-schools and provision of non-teaching staff in pre-tertiary education (Minister for Local Affairs, 2015[34]; Assembly of the Republic of Albania, 2018[35]; MoESY, 2018[23]; The Parliament of Albania, 2015[36]; SCHROEDER, 2007[37]). However, this weighted formula does not provide differential funding based on the needs of students.

Rather, it responds to characteristics of the population in a given LGU such as the number of students in each level of education and the level of income within the LGU. Moreover, LGUs have flexibility in how these funds are targeted, which means funds are not necessarily used to redress disparities.

Spending on capital investment in and around schools is inadequate

Further capital investment is needed to ensure school environments and the infrastructure in and around schools is up to contemporary standards (MoESY, 2018[23]; Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]). Many schools, particularly those in rural areas, struggle to meet their basic infrastructure needs (e.g. heating) (Gjokutaj, 2013[39]). In addition, due to migration patterns from villages to cities, some schools have become overcrowded, and some schools do not have adequate lab equipment, furniture or facilities, including information and communications technology infrastructure, for supporting high-quality learning (UNESCO, 2017[24]; Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]; MoESY, 2018[23]). In Albania, 47% of computers in rural schools are connected to the Internet, as compared to 70% in North Macedonia and 94% on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2016[25]). Poor infrastructure around schools, namely the road and transport system, also place limits on student access to schooling and on the ability to consolidate schools, particularly in remote rural areas (MoESY, 2018[23]).

Private funding of education is increasing

Private schools are a growing component of the Albanian pre-tertiary education system. Between 2005-2006 and 2014-2015, enrolment in private schools grew faster than in public schools at the basic education level (MoESY, 2018[23]). While enrolment in private schools at the upper secondary level has increased, enrolment in public school at this level has decreased. Albanian law allows financial support to be provided to private, not-for-profit pre-tertiary education institutions that have been operating for at least five years; however, this provision has not yet been implemented due to budget constraints (MoESY, 2012[26]; MoESY, 2018[23]).

While there has been no public spending on private education, private spending by individuals and households has increased in recent years, from a level of 0.8% of GDP in 2009 to 0.9% of GDP in 2017 (MoESY, 2018[23]). Public spending as a percentage of GDP decreased over the same period, from 3.4% to 3.2%. This raises equity concerns. Notable areas of private spending are tuition, which by some estimates can range from EUR 50 to EUR 300 per month in schools, and educational materials such as textbooks. Philanthropic contributions to education are negligible in Albania (UNESCO, 2017[24]; MoESY, 2018[23]).

In some countries, private spending in education can sometimes include private tutoring or shadow education. However, there is little research on this issue in Albania. The Albanian Teachers' Code of Conduct has banned the practice of teachers providing private tutoring to their own students, and legally it is considered malpractice. However, reports indicate that the situation in Albania is not unlike in neighbouring countries, where very little attention has been paid to the effects of private tutoring on educational equity (UNESCO, 2017[24]).

Structure of schooling in Albania

The Albanian pre-tertiary education system includes pre-school education, basic education (comprising primary and lower secondary education) and upper secondary education (often referred to in Albania as simply secondary education) (see Figure 1.3). Only basic education is compulsory. In 2012, the length of compulsory education increased from eight to nine years, a duration similar to the length of compulsory schooling found in OECD countries.

Figure 1.3. Structure of the education system in Albania

ISCED level	Starting Age	Grade	Education programme in English (examinations where applicable)		
8	24/25		Higher Education - Doctoral Studies		Long-term Specialisation Studies
7	22/23		Higher Education - Master's Programmes	First and Second Cycle Integrated Studies	
6	18/19		Higher Education - Bachelor's Programmes		
4	18/19			Post-secondary Professional Degree or Certificate	
			State Matura Examination		
3	15	13			Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level III (1 year)
		12	Upper Secondary Education - Gymnasium (3 years)	Upper Secondary Education - Oriented (can be 3 or 4 years)	Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level II (1 year)
		11			Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level I (2 years)
		10			
			National Basic Education Examination		
2	11	9	Basic Education - Lower Secondary School (4 years) **Compulsory**		
		8			
		7			
		6			
1	6	5	Basic Education - Primary School (5 years) **Compulsory**		
		4			
		3			
		2			
		1			
0	5 - 6		Pre-primary Education - Kindergarten		Pre-primary Education - Preparatory Classes
	4 - 5				
	3 - 4				

Source: MoESY (2018[23]); *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania,* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Early childhood education

Most Albanian children attend pre-school

Pre-school in Albania is optional and consists of kindergarten and preparatory classes for children aged three to six. Kindergartens operate in age groups of 3-4 year-olds, 4-5 year-olds and 5-6 year-olds, while preparatory classes take place in basic education schools and target five-year-old children who may or may not have previously attended pre-school. The net enrolment rate at the pre-primary level in Albania has greatly increased since 2000, reaching about 81% in 2016 (UIS, 2020[27]). The rate in 2017 was about 80%, lower than in the OECD on average (84%) and the EU (87%), but significantly higher than in Serbia (61%) and Montenegro (60%). About 8% of pre-primary education students were enrolled in a private institution in Albania in 2017, as compared to 34% on average in the OECD.

Challenges persist in delivering quality pre-school education

The ministry has made efforts to increase the quality of pre-school education over the last several years. These have included the adoption in 2016 of a new competency-based Pre-School Curriculum Framework aligned to contemporary child development theories and practise (ASCAP, 2016[40]), as well as a 2018 law that set forth new minimum standards and selection procedures for pre-primary principals (MoESY, 2018[41]). However, the quality of teaching staff and the physical condition of pre-schools remain key challenges (UNESCO, 2017[24]; Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]). For example, in some regions, particularly areas with higher poverty such as the northeast of the country, it has been difficult to find qualified pre-school teachers, in part due to migration toward urban centres. In an effort to deliver more effective pre-school educational services adapted to local needs, the responsibility for staffing pre-schools now lies with LGUs (see above Funding of the education system).

Primary and secondary education

Variability in class size and student to teacher ratios present challenges

About 49% of enrolment in basic education in 2016-2017 was in rural areas, as compared to 54% in 2006-2007 (MoESY, 2018[42]). In rural areas, there are about 17 students per class in public basic education, as compared to about 21 students per class on average across all Albanian basic education public schools. However, about 27% of classrooms in Albania had over 30 students in 2015-2016, and overcrowding is of particular concern in urban centres (UNESCO, 2017[24]). Some teachers have reported class sizes of over 40 students, beyond the legal limit. In OECD countries, the average class size is about 21 and 23 for primary and lower secondary schools respectively (OECD, 2018[43]).

The student to teacher ratio in public basic education is smaller in rural areas, about 11, as compared to a national average of about 14 (MoESY, 2018[42]). At the upper secondary level, the student per teacher ratio in public schools is also lower in rural areas (about 13) than on average in Albania (about 14). In OECD countries, the ratio of students to teaching staff is 15 across all primary schools, 13 in public lower secondary schools and 13 overall (OECD, 2018[43]).

The presence of multi-shift schools and multi-grade classrooms raises equity concerns

Several features of the basic school system in Albania stand out when compared with school networks in most OECD and EU countries. These include the relatively large number of students enrolled in multi-shift schools (12%) and multi-grade classrooms (10%) (UNESCO, 2017[24]). Recent national data indicate that about 22 000 students attend a multi-grade classroom, which is a concern in terms of equity. Multi-grade classrooms have lower levels of reading and writing skills and have faced particular challenges in implementing the new competency-based curriculum (UNESCO, 2017[24]).

Challenges remain in the supply of and demand for quality teachers

Albania has engaged in several important efforts to improve the quality of teaching. These include raising entry requirements and moving toward the standardisation of curriculum content for certain initial teacher education programmes, updating teaching standards, implementing a state exam for new entrants to the teaching profession, and setting up professional learning networks (see Chapter 3). In addition, the percentage of teachers that have attained some level of higher education has increased from two-thirds of teachers in 2006-2007 to 91% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018[42]). However, data from the OECD Teacher and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicate that this percentage is below the average across participating countries and economies in the OECD (98%) and in the EU (98%) (OECD, 2019[44]). Moreover, there remain concerns about the quality of teachers, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas. As reported by principals in the PISA 2015 survey, the gap in the quality and quantity of teaching staff between rural and urban schools is particularly large in Albania, and Albania is one of only ten countries and economies where the quality of teaching staff is of greater concern among rural school principals than among city school principals (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019[15]). Economically disadvantaged areas of Albania also have greater difficulty finding quality teachers, in part due to migration into urban areas (UNESCO, 2017[24]).

Most students who finish basic education go onto enrol in upper secondary education, but the share enrolled in VET programmes is low

At the end Grade 9, all students take the National Basic Education Examination. The pass rate for all tests taken in 2017 was 99.2%, which indicates the National Basic Education Examination is not a barrier for entry into upper secondary education (MoESY, 2017[45]). Those students that complete basic education have increasingly become more likely to enrol in upper secondary education. The percentage of students who received a basic education diploma and enrolled in Grade 10 the following year increased from 80% in 2006-2007 to 95% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018[42]).

At the upper secondary level, students can choose to enter general (*gymnasium*), "oriented" (e.g. arts) or vocational programmes. The number of places in oriented programmes are limited and entrance is primarily merit-based. National data indicate that in 2019 about 3% of students who completed basic education enrolled in an oriented programme. About 17% of upper secondary students were enrolled in vocational studies in 2017, the most recent year for which there is international data (UIS, 2020[27]). This is a much lower share than on average in the OECD (44%) and the EU (48%). Students in vocational programmes are able to enter tertiary education after completing four years (or three levels) of vocational education. However, students in general programmes can enter university after only three years. This dis-incentivises enrolment in vocational education by students who are interested in these programmes but are also interested in attending a university.

The State Matura Examination certifies completion of upper secondary education and is used for selection into higher education

The role of the State Matura Examination has evolved over time. Prior to 2006, it was used primarily to certify completion of upper secondary education, while universities carried out their own examinations to select for entry into their institutions. To combat high levels of corruption in university entry and admission processes, increase the level of reliability, validity and trustworthiness and reduce the amount of student testing, the State Matura Examination became the upper secondary exit and tertiary entry instrument in 2006. National data indicate that the vast majority of students pass the State Matura Examination, which suggests access to tertiary education is limited in part by the ability of students to remain in school until the State Matura Examination in Grade 12. The graduation rate – calculated nationally by dividing the number of graduates by the number of students registered in the Matura – in 2016-2017 was 94% (INSTAT, 2018[10]).

In 2016, a new higher education law provided greater flexibility on the use of the State Matura Examination as the basis for entry into higher education programmes. While students must still achieve a minimum score based on a formula weighting set by the Council of Ministers, universities are allowed to develop their own criteria, which are publicly available, set quotas and conduct their own ranking of applicants (Council of Ministers of Albania, 2019[46]; MoESY, 2018[23]; Albanian Academic Network, 2020[47]). The use of additional criteria by universities has thus far been limited, and there are mixed views among universities as to whether adding criteria will make schools less competitive in enrolling students or, by setting higher expectations, increase the quality of candidates.

Main trends in participation, learning and equity in primary and secondary education

Participation in primary education in Albania has increased to EU and OECD levels in recent years, but participation in secondary education remains low. Many students drop out of school. Students have increasingly opted to enrol in private schools over public schools. While Albania has significantly improved learning outcomes in recent years, the number of students mastering basic competencies remains low, and very few students are developing higher order skills by the age of 15. Equity of access and outcomes remains a challenge, particularly on the basis of gender, ethnic group and geographical distribution.

Participation

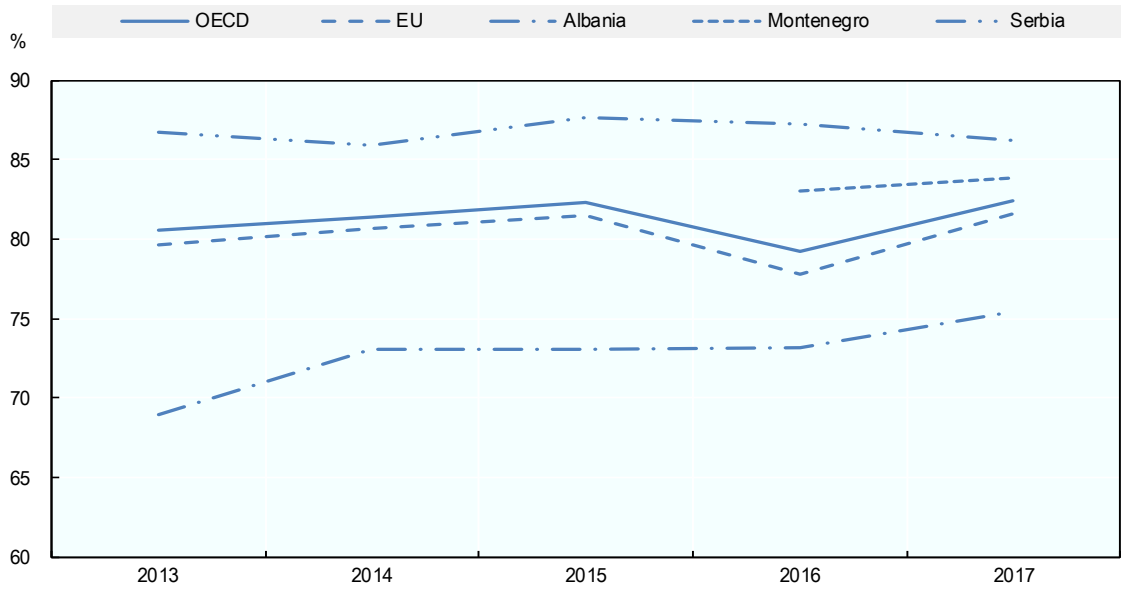
Participation in primary education has increased to EU and OECD levels in recent years, but participation in secondary education is low

Under communist rule prior to the early 1990s, enrolment rates in basic education were near-universal in Albania (UNESCO, 2017[24]). At the primary level, enrolment rates declined significantly in the 2000s and have increased overall since 2009 (UIS, 2020[27]). The net enrolment rate in primary education in Albania in 2017, the most recent year for which there is international data, was about 96%. This was slightly higher than in Serbia (95%) and comparable to the rate in Montenegro (96%), the OECD on average (96%) and the EU (96%).

At the secondary level, net enrolment rates are low in Albania. In lower secondary education, the Albanian net enrolment rate (86%) in 2017 was below that of Serbia (95%), Montenegro (92%), the OECD on average (91%) and the EU (91%) (UIS, 2020[27]). At the

upper secondary level, the net enrolment rate in Albania (75%) was significantly below Montenegro (84%), Serbia (86%) and the average in the OECD (83%) and the EU (82%) (see Figure 1.4). This reflects in part the comparatively high dropout rates in Albania (see below).

Figure 1.4. Net enrolment rates in upper secondary education (2013-2017)



Source: UIS (2020[27]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/ (accessed on 16 January 2020).

Students in Albania drop out at higher rates than in neighbouring countries

The cumulative dropout rate in primary education was 6.8% in Albania in 2016, the most recent year for which there is international data (UIS, 2020[27]). This is more than double the rate in the in the EU (2.5%), more than 3 times the rate in the OECD (1.8%) and Montenegro (2.0%), and more than 4 times in the rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.6%) and Serbia (1.5%). In lower secondary general education, the cumulative dropout rate in Albania in 2016 was 5.5%. This rate is higher than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.0%), Montenegro (0.8%) and Serbia (4.5%), and over double the rate in the EU (2.4%) and in the OECD (2.4%).

A 2017 study by the ministry highlighted several reasons for school abandonment in Albania. These include the distance between school and home, particularly at the lower secondary education level; pressure to contribute to family income; family obligations such as caring for children and elders and doing housework; early marriage; social pressure from other students who have left school; and risk factors such as disability, ethnicity, migration and poverty (MoESY, 2017[48]).

In response to these challenges, Albania has implemented several interventions since the mid-2000s. These include: the creation of a “second chance” programme that provides students with additional opportunities to finish school; the provision of free textbooks to Roma and Balkan Egyptian students; home school options for students in “blood feuds”; the establishment of a psycho-social unit to follow up with students who have dropped out or are at risk to do so; and the adoption of criteria for auxiliary teachers for students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017[24]). In addition, UNICEF has worked with the ministry to

design and implement an early warning system model to prevent drop-out in 20 schools and four municipalities.

Participation in tertiary education has declined in recent years

School life expectancy (from primary education through tertiary education) has increased from 10.6 years in 2000 to 14.8 years in 2017, similar to that of neighbouring countries like Serbia (14.7 years) and Montenegro (15.0 years), though lower than the average in the EU (17.1 years) and the OECD (17.2 years) (UIS, 2020[27]). However, after a consistent increase since 1991, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education has fallen from 66% in 2014 to 55% in 2018. This is in part due to the closure of private universities awarding a high volume of reportedly low-quality degrees, as well as migration outflows driven by the pursuit of education and career opportunities abroad (see Social context).

Private school enrolment is increasing

The share of students in basic education attending private schools has increased over time, with 4% in 2006-2007 compared to 7% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018[42]). Around 9% of basic education schools in Albania are private. At the upper secondary level, about 23% of schools are private and the share of enrolment in this sector has grown from about 8% in 2006-2007 to 11% in 2016-2017. The increase in enrolment in private schools in Albania is related to factors such as preferences for smaller class sizes, better infrastructure, foreign language curricula, twinning between Albanian and EU private schools and recognition of studies in Albanian private schools by some EU countries.

There is limited outcome evidence to suggest that private schools are of higher quality than public schools. State Matura Examination results show higher achievement among students in private schools than those in public school, but published results are not controlled for student characteristics such as socio-economic disadvantage and there is no analysis on the possible impact of positive self-selection into private schools (MoESY, 2017[49]). Average upper secondary course mark data also demonstrate higher achievement in private schools than in public schools, but these results are not comparable between schools (MoESY, 2017[49]). PISA 2018 data, however, show that on average private schools perform significantly higher in reading than public schools, even after accounting for students' ESCS (PISA's index of economic, social and cultural status) (OECD, 2019[50]).

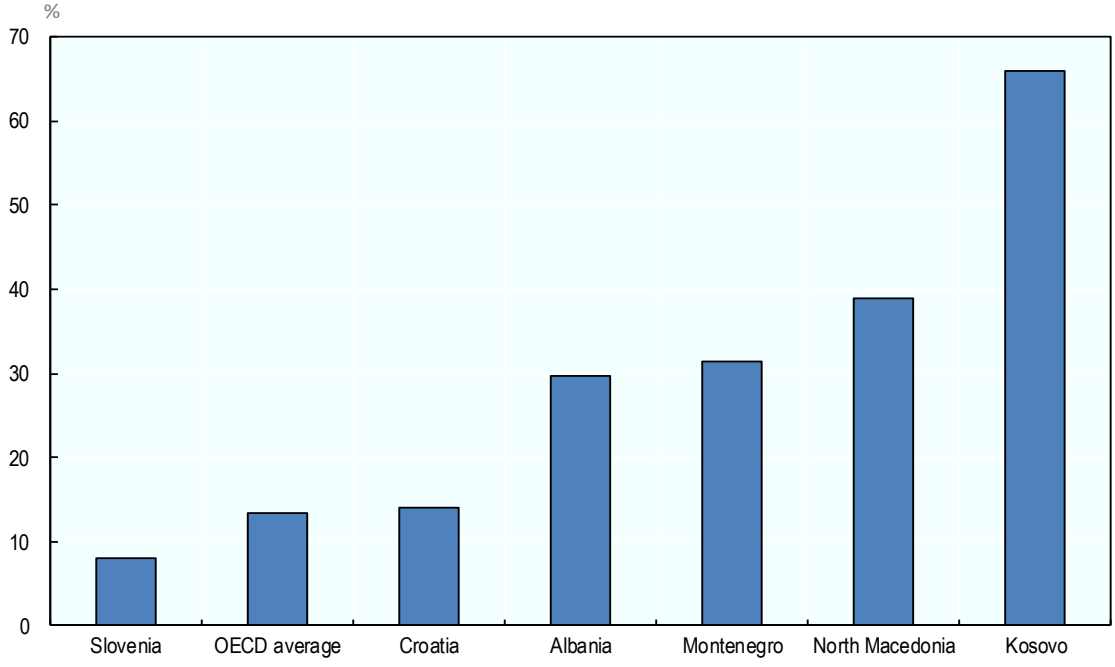
Learning environment and outcomes

Over half of 15-year-olds lack basic reading skills and 2 out of 5 lack basic mathematics skills

As compared to the OECD average (13.4%), Albania has a high proportion (29.7%) of students who are not demonstrating basic proficiency (Level 2) in all of the three core PISA domains (see Figure 2). Over half of Albanian 15-year-olds lack basic reading skills (52.2%), as compared to 22.6% on average in the OECD. In mathematics, 42.4% lack basic skills, as compared to 24.0% on average in the OECD. This suggests that a large number of students in Albania have not yet acquired the basic competencies needed to participate fully in a knowledge-based society upon completion of compulsory education. However, the proportion of students not demonstrating basic proficiency in all three domains (i.e. reading, mathematics and science) is lower in Albania than in neighbouring peer countries such as Montenegro (31.5%), North Macedonia (39%) and Kosovo (66%) (OECD, 2019[29]). The proportion not demonstrating basic proficiency in specific subjects has been

decreasing over time, with a significant reduction of 18.3 percentage points in mathematics between 2012 and 2018 and 10.3 percentage points in science between 2009 and 2018.

Figure 1.5. Share of low achievers in all three core PISA subjects (below Level 2)

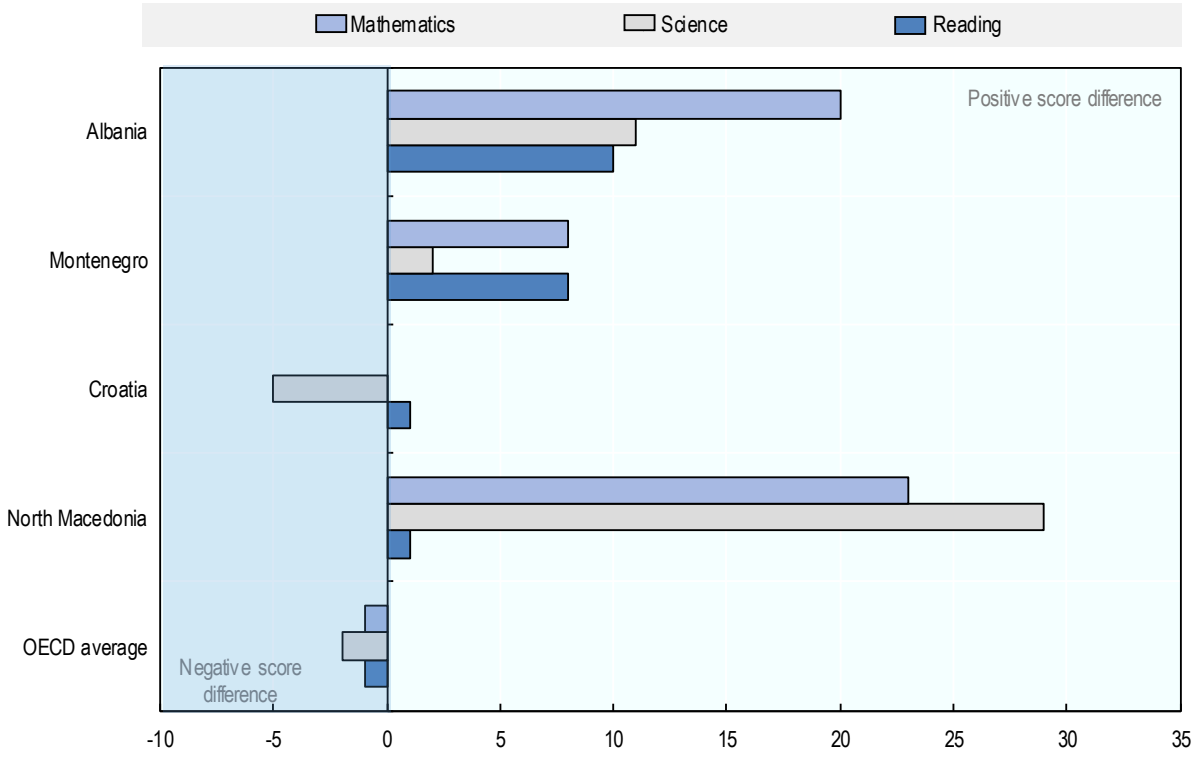


Source: OECD (2019[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do,* https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

Learning outcomes have increased significantly over time but still lag behind the OECD average

The latest PISA results indicate that long-term trends in mean scores in all three PISA subjects are positive and significantly higher in Albania than in most of its neighbouring countries and the OECD on average (see Figure 1.6). Short-term growth in performance in mathematics in Albania has been particularly significant, with the mean score increasing by about 24 points since the last PISA survey, as compared to 12 points in Montenegro, -1 points in Slovenia and 2 points in OECD countries (OECD, 2019[29]). Moreover, the gap between the highest- and lowest-achieving students is closing, with improvements in the bottom of the performance distribution outpacing improvements at the top in every subject.

Figure 1.6. Average 3-year trend in performance across PISA assessments



Note: The average 3-year trend is the average change, per 3-year period, between the earliest available measurement in PISA and PISA 2018, calculated by a linear regression.
Source: OECD (2019[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do,* https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

Evidence suggests there is a relatively positive classroom climate in Albania

Data from PISA 2018 indicates that the percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that certain teacher behaviours hinder student learning to some extent or a lot is lower in Albania than on average in the OECD (OECD, 2019[51]). These behaviours include teachers not meeting individual students' needs, teacher absenteeism, staff resisting change, teachers being too strict with students and teachers not being well-prepared for classes.

Additional evidence suggests that Albanian schools offer a positive classroom climate. Albania ranked first among PISA countries and economies in the percentage of students reporting that their teachers support them (OECD, 2019[51]). Based on students' reports, Albania has one of the most positive disciplinary climates among the countries which participated in PISA 2018 (OECD, 2019[51]).Moreover, UNESCO has found that a culture of mutual support is common among students, that teachers exhibit a collaborative spirit and that students feel happy in their interactions with teachers. However, the authors found that teachers find it difficult to differentiate instruction for the various levels of ability found among students in their classrooms (UNESCO, 2017[24]).

Instructional time in Albania is limited and prescribed, but schools have some flexibility in how the school day is organised

The minimum instruction time for compulsory education in Albania, 6 025 hours, is lower than in most EU countries, but higher than in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019[52]). In Albania, the ministry defines the percentage of learning time during each curriculum stage, which spans multiple grade levels, and the percentage of instructional time per week that should be dedicated to each subject area (AQAPUE, 2014[53]; AQAPUE, 2018[54]). Lessons are mandated to be 45 minutes long.

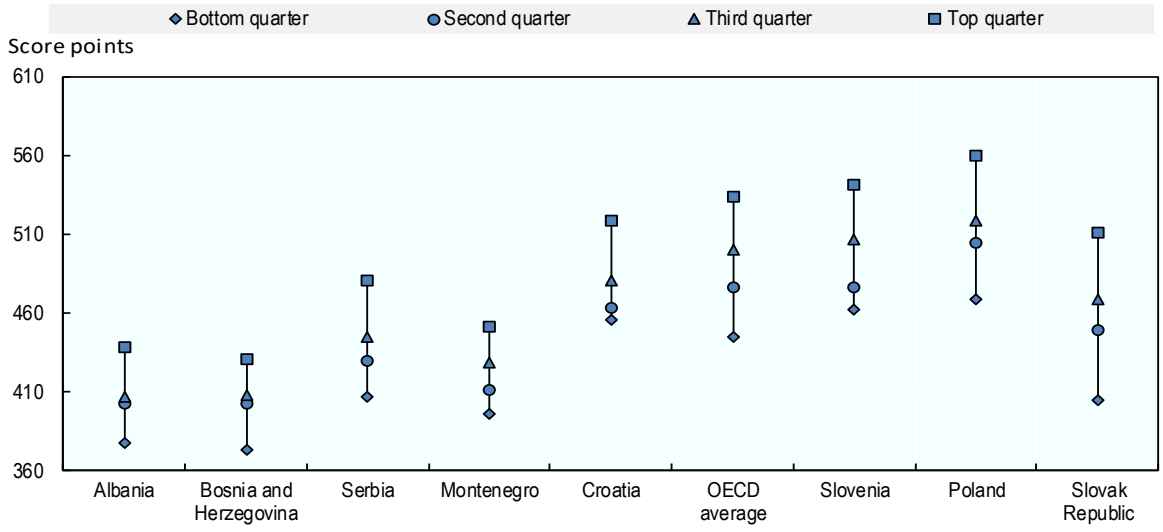
A 2018 reform, titled "Three Subjects in Six Hours," has provided schools more flexibility in how they choose to organise the instructional day. Prior to the reform, each 45-minute block in a day was dedicated to a different subject, with 4-6 blocks per day depending on the level of schooling (MoESY, 2018[55]). With the reform, schools may choose to offer a subject for two consecutive 45-minute blocks. The purpose of the reform was to reduce the number of books students had to carry in a single day and to allow students to engage in a wider range of instructional activities, especially those that require more time, application of knowledge and group work. Indeed, research suggests that teachers have found the new curriculum difficult to implement in 45-minute lessons, in part because it takes longer to plan engaging student activities (Gonzalez, 2018[56]). However, some interviewees during the OECD mission noted that with the new reform teachers saw their students fewer days per week, which impacted their ability to adequately assess students, suggesting that more support is needed to help schools make the most of the new flexibility.

Equity

Socio-economic conditions have an impact on student outcomes

Students in Albania from disadvantaged backgrounds perform lower than more advantaged students. Data from PISA 2018 indicate that students from the bottom quarter of the ESCS (PISA's index of economic, social and cultural status) in Albania performed 61 score points lower, equivalent to about two of schooling, in reading than their peers from the top quarter of the ESCS (see Figure 1.7). This gap is slightly larger than in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina (58) and Montenegro (55), though it is not as large as that found across OECD countries (average difference of 89 score points) (OECD, 2019[57]). Despite this gap, more disadvantaged students are academically resilient (able to beat the odds and achieve high performance levels in PISA) in Albania (12.3%) than on average in the OECD (11.3%) (OECD, 2019[57]).

Figure 1.7. Performance in reading by national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (PISA 2018)



Source: OECD (2019[57]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed,* https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en.

Females have higher enrolment rates and better outcomes in education than males

Females have a higher net enrolment rate than males in the compulsory education age group (100% versus 96%) and at the upper secondary level (78% versus 73%), according to the most recent international data available (2017) (UIS, 2020[27]). In OECD countries on average, these gaps are slightly smaller, with parity (98%) in the compulsory age group and a 3 percentage point difference (84% versus 81%) in favour of females at the upper secondary level. At the tertiary level, gross enrolment ratios indicate large gaps between females (70%) and males (46%), and this gap is larger than that found in OECD countries on average (83% versus 65%).

Females in Albania are also more likely to graduate from various levels of education and to complete more schooling than males. The gap in the gross graduation ratio between females and males is larger at higher levels of education, and females are expected to complete about 1.3 extra years of education as compared to males (15.5 years versus 14.2 years) (UIS, 2020[27]). This difference is higher than on average in OECD countries (17.6 for females versus 16.8 for males).

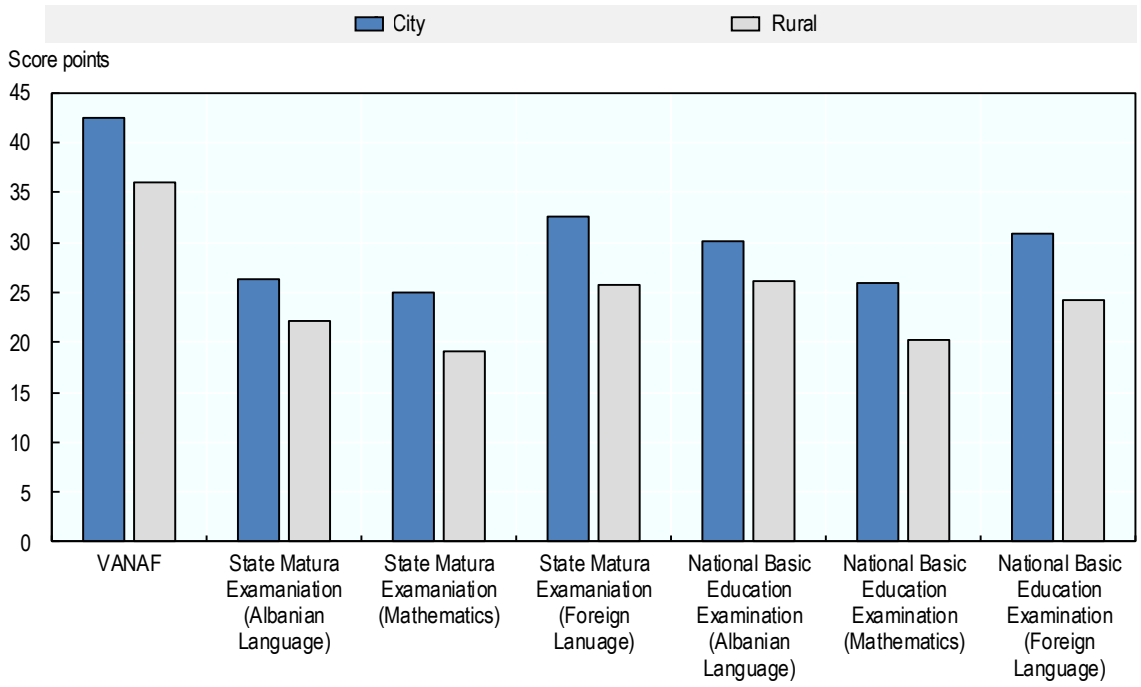
Females also outperform males in Albania across many outcome measures. For example, females score higher than males on Albania's national tests. Data from PISA 2018 show significantly higher performance for females than for males in the reading and science domains, as is the case on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2019[29]). In mathematics, the difference in performance between females and males is not significant in Albania, while on average in OECD countries females perform lower than males. In addition, fewer females than males lack basic science and reading skills (i.e. the percentage of females who are low achievers is smaller than that of males). This percentage point gap in favour of females is greater in Albania (10.7 in science and 20.1 in reading) than on average in OECD countries (2.4 in science and 10.2 in reading).

Student access and outcomes differ between city and rural schools

Remote rural areas do not offer the same spread of learning opportunities as compared to areas with higher population densities. For example, data from PISA 2015 indicate that a significantly greater number of extracurricular activities are offered in urban schools than in rural schools, as is the case on average in the OECD (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019[15]). In addition, internal migration patterns, which have contributed to overcrowded classrooms in some urban areas and to difficulty in recruiting quality teachers to rural areas, have contributed to regional differences in student access to quality learning opportunities (see Primary and secondary education). Efforts to provide better learning opportunities by consolidating schools are limited by poor transportation infrastructure connecting remote regions of Albania.

Outcomes as measured by educational attainment and international and national assessments are better in cities than in rural areas. On average, urban regions in Albania have attained two years more of schooling than rural regions (10.5 versus 8.6) (Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]). Data from PISA 2018 indicate that, in all three domains, students from rural schools in Albania have lower mean scores than students from urban schools (OECD, 2019[50]). While students from urban schools outperform students from rural schools in most OECD countries, the difference in reading performance is lower in Albania (difference of 33 points) than on average in the OECD (difference of 43 points). National assessment and examinations data show a similar pattern of higher performance for students from cities than for students from rural areas (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8. National assessment and examinations performance, 2016-2017



Source: ESC (2017[58]), *Matura Shtetërore 2017 Raport Publik mbi Arritjet e Nxënësve [State Matura Public Report about Students' Achievements]*, The Educational Services Centre, Tirana; MoESY (2017[59]), *Vlerësimi i Arritjeve të Nxënësve [Assessment of Students' Achievements of the 5th Grade]*, The Educational Services Centre, Tirana; ESC (2017[60]), *Provimet Kombëtare të Arsimit Bazë 2017: Raport Publik mbi Arritjet e Nxënësve [National Education Exam of 2017: Public Report about Students' Achievements]*, The Educational Services Centre, Tirana.

Equity for Roma and Balkan Egyptian populations remains a concern

Educational outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptians, who represent about 1.2% and 2.5% respectively of public basic education enrolment, remain among the lowest in Albania (UNESCO, 2017[24]). For example, among Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20, roughly 1% and 5% respectively have completed secondary education. Roma and Balkan Egyptian students also have some of the highest rates of dropout in the country. For Roma specifically, the school dropout rate is about 50% (Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]). Moreover, by some estimates, over half of Roma children aged 6-16 have never been enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2017[24]). Achievement outcomes are also low for Roma: the literacy rate among Roma is 65%, 30 percentage points lower that of non-Roma, and data from the VANAF show that Roma students score an average of 29 out of 100 points, compared to 45 on average across Albania (Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]).

Albania has engaged in efforts to improve education for Roma and Balkan Egyptians, illustrated especially by the doubling of the number of Roma in kindergarten since 2011 (UNESCO, 2017[24]). Policy responses to low educational outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptian students have included a textbook reimbursement program and efforts to promote Roma and Balkan Egyptian identities as an integral part of Albania's cultural heritage. However, research suggests further efforts are needed to close equity gaps. In particular, the level of funding in the education sector is inadequate for providing access, promoting inclusivity and improving outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptians (Psacharopoulos, 2017[38]).

Box 1.2. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment look at how evaluation and assessment policy can be used to improve student outcomes. They assess countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices for school education, and draw on insights from international practices, to provide actionable recommendations.

The reviews focus on four key components:

Student assessment monitors and provides feedback on individual student progress and certifies the achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessments as well as large-scale, external assessments and examinations.

Teacher appraisal assesses the performance of teachers in providing quality learning for their students.

School evaluation looks at the effectiveness of schools in providing quality education.

System evaluation uses educational information to monitor and evaluate the education system against national goals.

The reviews draw on existing OECD work on evaluation and assessment, which included reviews of 18 countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices. Each country review is based on national information, provided by the country to the OECD; background research and country visits. During the country visits a team of OECD staff and international experts meet with key actors across the education system to identify policy strengths and challenges, and discuss the challenges of evaluation and assessment with national actors. The OECD prepares a report for the country which analyses national practices and policies, and provides policy recommendations to strengthen evaluation and assessment linked to national goals and priorities.

Key indicators

	List of key indicators	Albania	OECD
Background information			
Economy			
1	GDP per capita PPP, constant 2011 international USD, 2018 *	12 306	40 490
2	GDP annual growth rate (in percentage), 2018 *	4.1	2.3
Society			
3	Population annual growth rate, 2018 *	- 0.2	0.6
4	Population aged 14 years or less (%), 2018 *	18	18
5	Fertility rate (births per woman), 2017 *	1.6	1.7
6	Rural population (percentage of total population), 2018 *	40	19
7	*Unemployment rates*		
	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24 years old) (modelled ILO estimate), 2018 **	31.0	11.9
	Total unemployment rate (modelled ILO estimate), 2018 **	13.9	5.3
Education indicators			
System			
8	Official entrance age of pre-primary education, 2018 ***	3	3.1
9	Starting age of compulsory education, 2018 ***	6	5.6
10	Duration of compulsory education (years), 2018 ***	9	10.8
Students			
11	*Net enrolment rates (2017)*		
	Pre-primary education ***	79.9	84.4
	Primary education ***	95.5	95.9
	Lower secondary education ***	86.3	90.8
	Upper secondary education ***	75.4	82.5
12	Share of students enrolled in vocational programmes in upper secondary level ***	16.5	43.5
13	Share of primary students enrolled in private schools ***	7.4	11.3
	Share of lower secondary students enrolled in private schools ***	6.5	15.3
Teachers			
14	*Ratio of students to teaching staff (2016)*		
	Primary education ***	18.2	12.8
	Lower secondary education ***	10.8	10.5
	Upper secondary education ***	14.5	11.8
15	*Share of female teachers (2016)*		
	Pre-primary education ***	100	96.7
	Primary education ***	84.6	84.7
	Lower Secondary education ***	65.1	70.8
	Upper Secondary education ***	65.0	61.0
Finance			
16	Total government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, all levels, 2016 ***	4.0	5.4
17	Total public expenditure on primary education as a percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2015 ***	56.8	25.2
18	Total public expenditure on secondary education as a percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2016 ***	25.4	34.6
19	*Initial government funding per student in constant PPP USD*		
	Primary education, 2015 ***	3 428.3	8 363.0
	Lower secondary education, 2016 ***	1 513.8	9 488.9

	List of key indicators	Albania	OECD
	Upper secondary education, 2016 ***	728.2	9 322.8
	Tertiary education, 2016 ***	1 738.2	11 467.8
Learning outcomes (PISA 2018)			
20	Mean students' performance in science ****	417	489
21	Mean students' performance in reading ****	405	487
22	Mean students' performance in mathematics ****	437	489
23	Percentage of students scoring at PISA proficiency level 5 or 6 in reading ****	0.4	8.7
24	Percentage of students scoring below PISA proficiency level 2 in reading ****	52.2	22.6
25	Percentage of variance in reading performance explained by students' and schools' socio-economic background ****	7.8	12.0
26	Percentage of resilient students (students in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status who perform in the top quarter of students internationally in reading)	12.3	11.3

Source: * The World Bank (2018[61]), *World Bank Indicators: Education*, https://data.worldbank.org/topic/education (accessed on 15 June 2018); ** International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018[62]), *ILOSTAT*, https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/ (accessed on 15 July 2018); *** UIS (2020[27]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/ (accessed on 14 June 2019); **** OECD (2019[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

Note

[1] Among the countries and economies whose cumulative expenditure per student is under USD 50 000 by age 15, higher expenditure on education is strongly associated with higher PISA science scores.

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Chapter 2. Improving learning outcomes through student assessment

This chapter looks at how the assessment system in Albania measures and shapes student learning. A key challenge is how to bring practices into line with an ambitious new competency-based curriculum. While policy promotes modern, formative approaches, many teachers lack the skills and support to apply such methods in the classroom. Summative testing continues to dominate, with teachers requiring more help on how to provide feedback and use assessment data to help students advance. The national assessment and examination system could also be strengthened in order to provide more reliable information on the extent to which students are meeting national learning expectations. This chapter suggests ways to do this, including by making fuller use of digital technologies.

Introduction

The primary purpose of student assessment is to determine what students know and are capable of doing. Student assessment results can help students advance in their learning and support them in making informed decisions on the next step in their education. In Albania, international assessment results indicate that by age 15 students have fallen well behind their peers in most OECD and EU countries, and the majority have not mastered foundational competencies by the end of compulsory schooling (OECD, 2019[1]). In addition, Albanian students are relatively weak in performing complex tasks that require higher-order cognitive skills. The 2014 curriculum reform sought to improve learning outcomes by shifting toward a competency-based approach to pedagogy, seeking also to make learning more relevant to young people. However, teachers need more support to detect and address learning gaps as they emerge and to assess complex competencies needed for life beyond school.

This chapter discusses how Albania can strengthen its student assessment system, including its national assessment and examination system, to improve teacher practice and student learning outcomes. The chapter recommends the revision and clarification of national assessment policies, particularly in the areas of formative assessment and portfolio assessment. It also recommends providing teachers with concrete guidance and resources, as well as high-quality preparation and training, in specific areas of teacher assessment practice such as diagnostic assessment, providing feedback and making use of external benchmarks (e.g. national assessment results). Finally, a review of the design, administration and scoring of the national examinations is needed in order to improve the examination system's ability to provide reliable information about student learning and to build capacity across the teacher workforce.

Key features of an effective student assessment system

Student assessment refers to the processes and instruments used to evaluate student learning. These include assessment by teachers as part of school-based, classroom activities, such as daily observations and periodic quizzes, and through standardised examinations and assessments designed and graded outside schools.

Overall objectives and policy framework

At the centre of an effective policy framework for student assessment is the expectation that assessment supports student learning (OECD, 2013[2]). This expectation requires clear and widely understood national learning objectives. Assessment regulations must orient teachers, schools and assessment developers on how to use assessment to support learning goals.

To these ends, effective assessment policy frameworks encourage a balanced use of summative and formative assessments, as well as a variety of assessment types (e.g. teacher observations, written classroom tests and standardised instruments). These measures help to monitor a range of student competencies and provide students with an appropriate balance of support, feedback and recognition to encourage them to improve their learning. Finally, effective assessment frameworks also include assurance mechanisms to regulate the quality of assessment instruments, in particular central, standardised assessments.

The curriculum and learning standards communicate what students are expected to know and be able to do

Common expected learning outcomes against which students are assessed are important to determine their level of learning and how improvements can be made (OECD, 2013[2]). Expectations for student learning can be documented and explained in several ways. Many countries define them as part of national learning standards. Others integrate them into their national curriculum frameworks (OECD, 2013[2]).

While most reference standards are organised according to student grade level, some countries are beginning to organise them according to competency levels (e.g. beginner and advanced), each of which can span several grades (Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 2007[3]). This configuration allows for more individualised student instruction but requires more training for teachers to properly understand and use the standards when assessing students.

Types and purposes of assessment

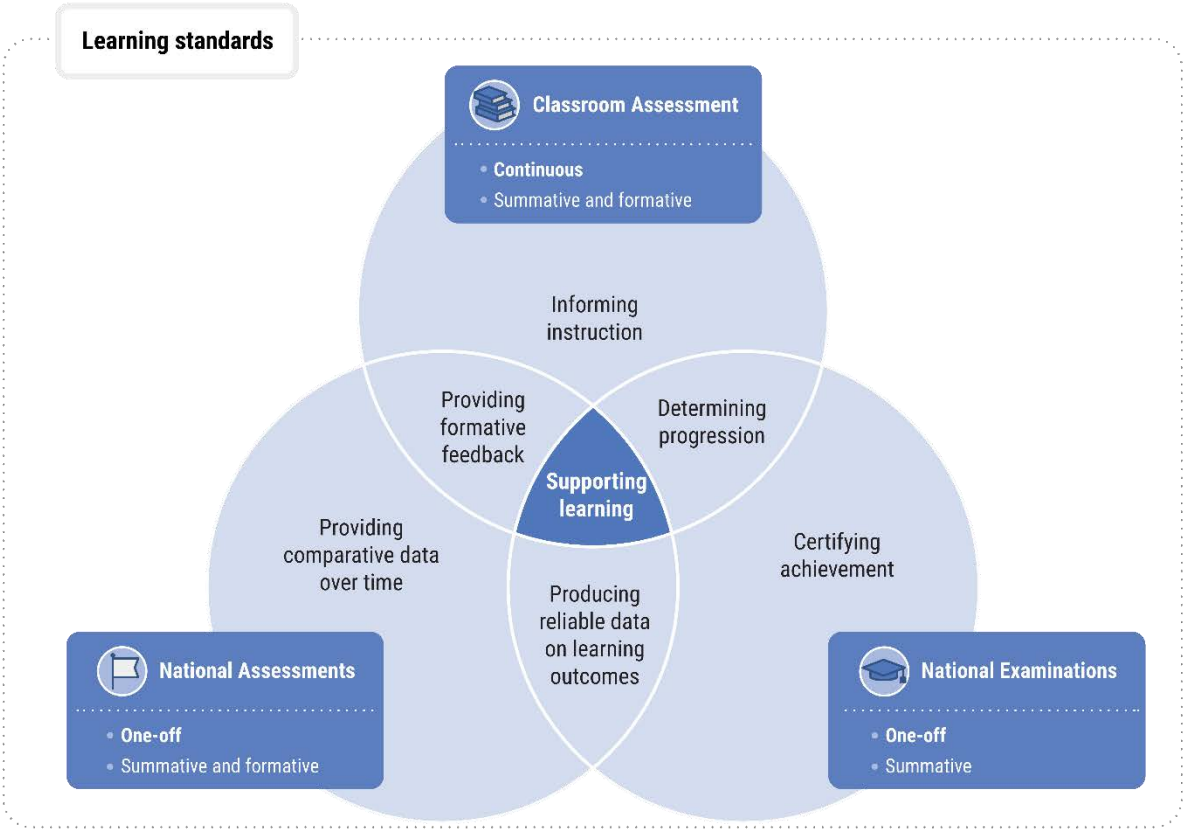
Assessments can generally be categorised into classroom assessments, national examinations and national assessments. Assessment has traditionally held a summative purpose, aiming to explain and document learning that has occurred. Many countries are now also emphasising the importance of formative assessment, which aims to understand learning as it occurs in order to inform and improve subsequent instruction and learning (see Box 2.1) (OECD, 2013[2]). Formative assessment is now recognised to be a key part of the teaching and learning process and has been shown to have one of the most significant positive impacts on student achievement among all educational policy interventions (Black and Wiliam, 1998[4]).

Box 2.1. Purposes of assessment

- **Summative assessment** – assessment of learning summarises learning that has taken place in order to record, mark or certify achievements.
- **Formative assessment** – assessment for learning identifies aspects of learning as they are still developing in order to shape instruction and improve subsequent learning. Formative assessment frequently takes place in the absence of marking. For example, a teacher might ask students questions at the end of the lesson to collect information on how far students have understood the content and use the information to plan future teaching.

Source: OECD (2013[2]), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

Figure 2.1. Student assessment and learning



Classroom assessment

Among the different types of assessment, classroom assessment has the greatest impact on student learning (Absolum et al., 2009[5]). It supports learning by: regularly monitoring learning and progress; providing teachers with information to understand student learning needs and guide instruction; and helping students understand the next steps in their learning through the feedback their teachers provide.

Classroom assessments are administered by teachers in classrooms and can have both summative and formative purposes. They can be delivered in various formats, including closed multiple-choice questions, semi-constructed short-answer questions and open-ended responses such as essays or projects. Different assessment formats are needed for assessing different skills and subjects. In general, however, assessing complex competencies and higher-order skills requires the use of more open-ended assessment tasks.

In recent decades, as most OECD countries have adopted more competency-based curricula, there has been a growing interest in performance-based assessments such as experiments or projects. These types of assessments require students to mobilise a wider range of skills and knowledge, and demonstrate more complex competencies such as critical thinking and problem solving (OECD, 2013[2]). Encouraging and developing effective, reliable, performance-based assessment can be challenging. OECD countries that have tried to promote this kind of assessment have found that teachers have required far more support than initially envisaged.

Effective classroom assessment requires the development of teachers' assessment literacy

Assessment is now seen as an essential pedagogical skill. In order to use classroom assessment effectively, teachers need to understand how national learning expectations can be assessed – as well as the students' trajectory in reaching them – through a variety of assessments. Teachers need to know what makes for a quality assessment – validity, reliability, fairness – and how to judge if an assessment meets these standards (see Box 2.2). Feedback is important for students' future achievement and teachers need to be skilled in providing constructive and precise feedback.

Box 2.2. Key assessment terms

- **Validity** – focuses on how appropriate an assessment is in relation to its objectives. A valid assessment measures what students are expected to know and learn as set out in the national curriculum.
- **Reliability** – focuses on how consistent the assessment is measuring student learning. A reliable assessment produces similar results despite the context in which it is conducted, across different classrooms or schools for example. Reliable assessments provide comparable results.

Source: OECD (2013[2]), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

Many OECD countries are investing increasingly in the development of teachers' assessment literacy, starting with initial teacher education. In the past, teachers' initial preparation in assessment has been primarily theoretical; countries are now trying to make it more practical, emphasising opportunities for hands-on learning, where teachers can develop and use different assessments for example. Countries encourage initial teacher education providers to make this shift by incorporating standards on assessment in programme accreditation requirements and in the expectations of new teachers listed in national teacher standards.

It is essential that teachers' initial preparation on assessment is strengthened through ongoing, in-school development. Changing the culture of assessment in schools – especially introducing more formative approaches and performance-based assessments, and using summative assessments more effectively – requires significant and sustained support for teachers. Continuous professional development, such as training on assessment and more collaborative opportunities in which teachers can share effective assessment approaches, provides vital encouragement. Pedagogical school leaders also play an essential role in establishing a collaborative culture of professional enquiry and learning on the subject of assessment.

Finally, countries need to invest significantly in practical resources to ensure that learning expectations defined in national documents become a central assessment reference for teachers and students in the classroom. These resources include rubrics that set out assessment criteria, assessment examples aligned to national standards and marked examples of student work. Increasingly, countries make these resources available online through interactive platforms that enable teachers to engage in developing standards, which facilitates a greater feeling of ownership of the resources and makes it more likely that they will be used.

National examinations

National examinations are standardised assessments developed at the national or state level with formal consequences for students. The vast majority of OECD countries (31) now have exit examinations at the end of upper secondary education to certify student achievement and/or for selection into tertiary education, reflecting rising expectations in terms of student attainment and the importance of transparent systems for determining access to limited further education opportunities (see Figure 2.2). National examinations are becoming less common at other transition points as countries seek to remove barriers to progression and reduce early tracking. Among those OECD countries (approximately half) which continue to use national examinations to inform programme and/or school choice for entrants to upper secondary education, few rely solely or even primarily on the results of examinations to determine a student's next steps.

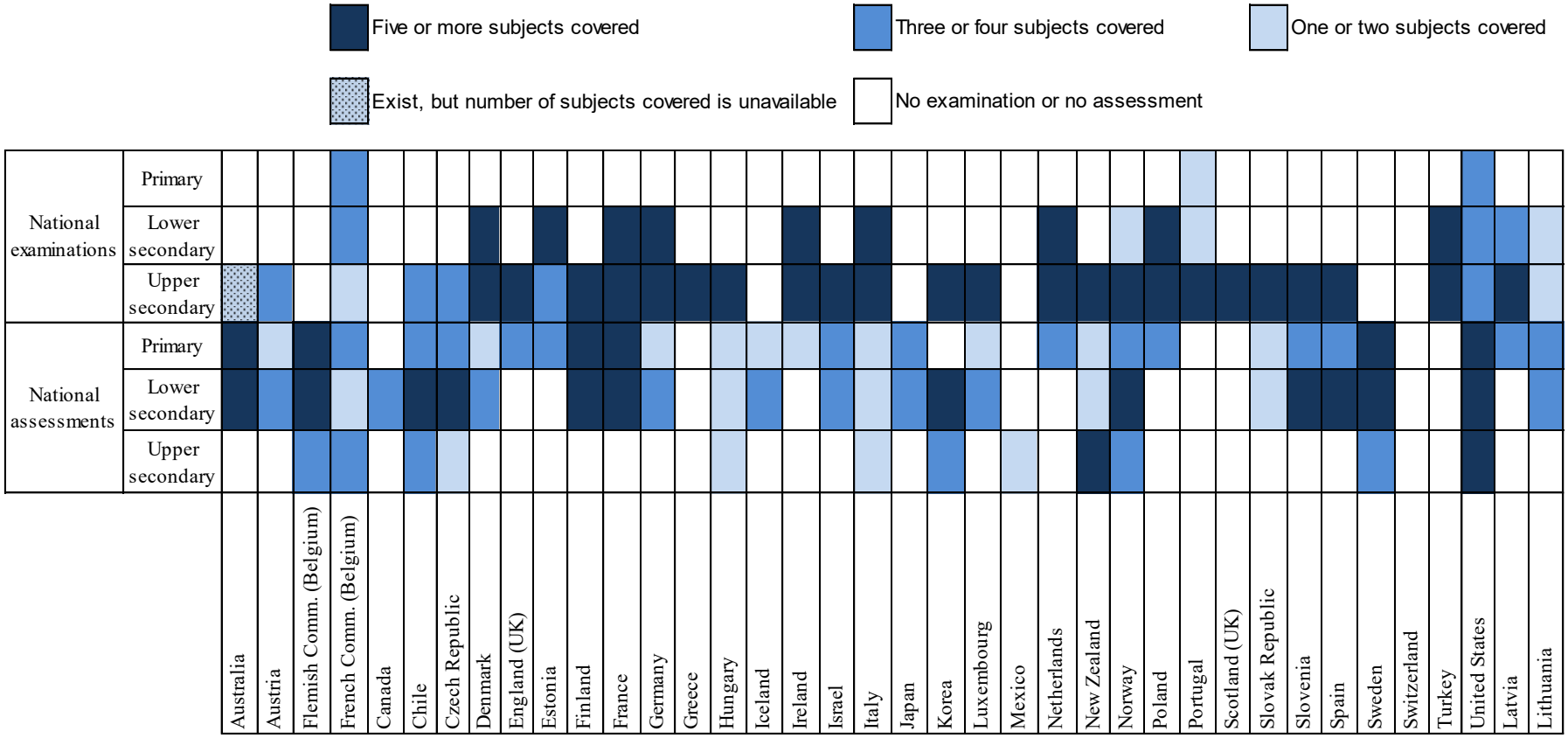
While classroom assessment is the most important assessment for learning, evidence shows that the pace of learning slows down without external benchmarks such as examinations. National examinations signal student achievement and in many countries carry high stakes for students' future education and career options, which can help to motivate students to apply themselves (Bishop, 1999[6]). They are also more reliable than classroom assessment and less susceptible to bias and other subjective pressures, making them a more objective and arguably fairer basis for taking decisions when opportunities are limited, such as access to university or high-demand schools.

However, there are limitations related to using examinations. For instance, they can only provide a limited snapshot of student learning based on performance in one-off, time-pressured exercises. To address this concern, most OECD countries complement examination data with classroom assessment information, teachers' views, student personal statements, interviews and extracurricular activities to determine educational pathways into upper secondary and tertiary education.

Another concern is that the high stakes of examinations can distort teaching and learning. If examinations are not aligned with the curriculum, teachers might feel compelled to dedicate excessive classroom time to examination preparation instead of following the curriculum. Similarly, students can spend significant time outside the classroom preparing for examinations through private tutoring. To avoid this situation, items on examinations must be a valid assessment of the curriculum's learning expectations and encourage high-quality learning across a range of competencies.

Most OECD countries are taking measures to address the negative impact that examination pressure can have on student well-being, attitudes and approaches to learning. For example, Korea has introduced a test-free semester system in lower secondary education with activities such as career development and physical education to develop students' life skills and reduce stress (OECD, 2016[7]).

Figure 2.2. National examinations and assessments in public school in OECD countries



1. Number of subjects covered in the assessment framework (subjects may be tested on a rotation basis).
2. Data for the national examinations and assessments in Lithuania are drawn from authors' considerations based on OECD (2017[8]), *Education in Lithuania*, Reviews of National Policies for Education, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281486-en.
Source: OECD (2015[9]), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.

National assessments

National assessments provide reliable information on student learning with no consequences for student progression. Across the OECD, the vast majority of countries (30) have national assessments to provide reliable data on student learning outcomes, comparative across different groups of students and over time (see Classroom assessment). The main purpose of a national assessment is system monitoring and, for this reason, they provide essential information for system evaluation (see Chapter 5).

Countries might also use national assessments for more explicit improvement purposes, such as to ensure that students are meeting national achievement standards and identify learning gaps needing further support. In these cases, providing detailed feedback to teachers and schools on common problems and effective responses is critical.

Many OECD countries also use national assessments for school accountability purposes, though there is considerable variation in how much weight is given to the data. This is because student learning is influenced by a wide range of factors beyond a school or teacher's influence – such as their prior learning, motivation, ability and family background (OECD, 2013[2]).

National assessment agencies

Developing high-quality national examinations and assessments requires a range of assessment expertise in fields such as psychometrics and statistics. Many OECD countries have created government agencies for examinations and assessments where this expertise is concentrated. Creating a separate organisation with stable funding and adequate resources also helps to ensure independence and integrity, which is especially important for high-stakes national examinations.

Student assessment in Albania

Since the start of the competency-based education reform in 2014, Albania has sought to make significant changes to the culture and system of assessment. This includes promoting formative assessment, diversifying assessment modes to include elements such as portfolios and, in 2019, reviewing national examinations to assess more complex, higher-order competencies. In 2020, Albania will also begin the roll-out of a curriculum-based national assessment.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that there is a divergence between the intent of Albania's assessment and curriculum frameworks and their implementation. Classroom assessment is mostly used for summative rather than formative purposes, and while teachers have adopted new requirements, such as continuous assessment, support in making full use of these practices has been limited. This limits teachers' ability to identify and address gaps in learning. The national assessment and examination systems provide some information to teachers on student achievement and progress. However, the system provides information on student learning along a narrow range of competencies found in the curriculum framework, and the results of the national assessment (VANAF) and the National Basic Education Examination are not nationally comparable. Albania will need to review its national assessment examination systems to improve their ability to provide information on student achievement vis-à-vis the new curriculum, as well as to strengthen teacher practices in schools. To further support teachers to make better use of assessment to improve learning, Albania will also need to ensure they have access to training, guidelines and tools on classroom assessment practice.

Table 2.1. Student assessment in Albania

Reference standards	Types of assessment	Body responsible	Process	Guideline documents	Frequency	Primary Use
National Curriculum Framework	National assessment	Educational Services Centre (ESC)	Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievements (VANAF): Grade 5 in Albanian language, mathematics and science	Law no.69/2012, as amended, and additional regulations	Every year	Monitor student progress at the system level Inform students, parents and schools on students' achievements
	National examinations	ESC	National Basic Education Examination: Grade 9 State Matura Examination: Grade 12	Law no.69/2012, as amended, and additional regulations	Once Once	Certification of completion of basic education Certification of completion of upper secondary school
	Classroom assessment	Teachers	Periodic assessment: 1) Continuous assessment 2) Portfolio (beginning in Grade 4) *or* classroom assignments, tasks and outputs (Grades 1-3) 3) Test or summative assignment Final assessment: Description along 5 levels of achievement (Grades 1-3); Numerical mark on 4-10 scale and description of strengths (Grades 4-12)	Education Development Institute, 2015, Student assessment framework Instruction on the assessment of basic education pupils Instruction on assessment of pre-university and higher education students Education Development Institute, 2016, Achievement levels for all educational cycles	Three times per year Once per year	Monitor student progress Evaluate student achievement Evaluate student achievement
International PISA Standards	International assessment	OECD	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): mathematics, science and reading		Every three years	ESC develops and disseminates national reports to inform policy and help educators make sense of and use data more effectively

Source: MoESY (2018[10]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania,* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Overall objectives and policy framework

Albania's assessment framework is well-aligned with the curriculum, and one notable strength is the importance given to assessment for learning. However, there are few accompanying materials to help teachers translate changing expectations for student learning and assessment into practice. Key concepts such as formative assessment and continuous assessment lack clarity and concreteness. While teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction in response to learner needs, they lack guidance on how to use assessment results to inform their planning and assess students in relation to curriculum standards. Moreover, some regulations continue to run counter to the curriculum, reinforcing outdated teacher-centred methods of summative testing.

The Albanian curriculum framework is competency-based

Albania's new competency-based curriculum framework was introduced in 2014 with a pilot in 26 schools in Grades 1 and 6. As of 2019, the new curriculum is being implemented at all grade levels. Prior to the reform, the curriculum lacked a clear and coherent vision and philosophy, and there was no official curriculum framework to steer the instructional system (UNESCO, 2017[11]). With the reform, Albania embraced a particularly ambitious framework meant to depart significantly from the primarily knowledge-based approach found in schools, as well as to align with modern European frameworks such as the European Union's 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO, 2017[11]; European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2006[12]). The new curriculum seeks to improve learning outcomes in part by placing an emphasis on a constructivist, student-centred approach to teaching and learning. However, a shift away from a teacher-centred pedagogy has yet to take hold in Albanian classrooms.

The concept of competency found in the new framework is similar to that found in many OECD countries, where competencies are often conceptualised as the ability of students to mobilise and use knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands (OECD, 2019[13]). National learning expectations for students in Albania are organised into three to seven competencies per subject area and seven key competencies for lifelong learning (i.e. communication and expression; thinking; learning to learn; life, entrepreneurship and the environment; personal; civil; and digital). Students are expected to develop these competencies by the end of upper secondary education. However, not all of these competencies are assessed, and there is therefore limited information on whether students are meeting this expectation.

The curriculum is organised into learning stages

The curriculum framework is organised into seven curricular "stages", each corresponding to a certain number of grades from early childhood education through Grade 12 (see Table 2.1). The organisation into stages is meant to align with periods of child development (AQAPUE, 2014[14]). It is also intended to allow teachers to flexibly plan and organise learning based on students' individual needs and level of progress. For every competency at every stage in schooling, there are corresponding levels of achievement and learning outcomes (MoESY, 2019[15]; MoESY, 2018[16]). These are meant to provide points of reference for mastery of competencies. Indicators of what students should be able to do at each of three levels in Grades 4-12 and four levels in Grades 1-3 are provided. Learning outcomes are described in detail using action verbs for what students should be demonstrating for each competency at each stage.

Organising learning outcomes by curriculum stage, such as the policy introduced in Albania, is an advanced practice in use in some OECD countries such as the United Kingdom (England) and New Zealand (Ministry of Education of New Zealand, n.d.[17]; Department for Education of England, 2014[18]). However, implementing this practice requires a significant investment in developing teachers' understanding of the learning outcomes and the implications for teaching and learning at each grade level. Many teachers in Albania have not yet developed the knowledge and expertise required to develop their own grade-level learning outcomes, in part due to limited training in this area during initial teacher education programmes and ongoing professional development.

Table 2.2. Albanian curricular stages and grade levels

Grade level(s)	Curricular stage
12	6
10 - 11	5
8 - 9	4
6 - 7	3
4 - 5	2
Preparatory class, 1 - 3	1
Pre-school	0

Source: AQAPUE (2014[14]), *Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parauniversitar të Republikës së Shqipërisë [Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education],* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana; MoESY (2019[15]), *Nivelet e Arritjes së Kompetencave të Fushave të të Nxënit [Levels of Achievement of Learning Area Competencies Elementary School],* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Albania introduced a new assessment framework in conjunction with the new curriculum framework

Albanian released a new assessment framework which includes several elements intended to help improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise learning outcomes (AQAPUE, n.d.[19]). For example, the framework promotes the use of formative assessment and makes the conceptual distinction between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. The framework also introduces new assessment methods, such as projects and portfolios, to support the assessment of a broader range of competencies, going beyond traditional knowledge-recall summative tests. The Albanian Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) notes that the major change in the new curriculum has been the implementation and reinforcement of continuous assessment and assessment for learning (MoESY, 2019[20]).

The application of new assessment concepts in the classroom is lacking

While the concepts outlined in the assessment framework are sound and in line with modern assessment frameworks, they have not been incorporated into classroom assessment practices. This is in part because teachers lack guidance on how to apply different assessment concepts in the classroom. For example, while assessment for learning is distinguished from assessment of learning, teachers are not provided with explicit classroom examples of how to use student assessment data for formative purposes, nor are they provided with guidance on the difference between feedback and summative judgement. Definitions of assessment for learning provided in Albania's assessment framework refer to monitoring the process of achievement, collecting information to improve the process and making students aware of their strengths and needs (AQAPUE, n.d.[19]). However, accompanying illustrations and explanations of what such practices look like and entail, such as a step-by-step guide for implementing formative assessment, are lacking. Certain formative assessment tools and resources such as guidance on providing quality oral and written feedback and diagnostic assessments are also missing.

Further resources for applying other assessment concepts in the classroom are also lacking. For example, there are no quality standards and few exemplars provided for the development of portfolio assessment tasks. In addition, the assessment framework encourages the types of tasks in continuous and end-of-term assessments to be more varied, focusing on skills and attitudes and going beyond knowledge. However, there are few resources such as sample assessments and marked student work available. Resources and

support for making changes to classroom assessment practice are particularly important, as these innovative assessment practices can be challenging to implement.

Classroom assessment

Albania distinguishes between three modes of classroom assessment

Albania's national frameworks and guidelines on curriculum and assessment (see Chapter 1) differentiate between three main modes of classroom assessments in Grades 4 to 12: continuous, end-of-term and portfolio (see Table 2.3). Continuous assessment, which is also used in Grades 1 to 3, was introduced in the 2014 reform to help teachers more closely monitor student progress, as well as to provide students with feedback on where they are in their learning. It refers to the ongoing assessment of student oral and written work, for which students are awarded a mark using numbers or symbols of the teacher's choosing. Teachers may choose any oral or written piece of work to make this assessment (AQAPUE, 2018[21]).

The end-of-term assessment is considered a more formal assessment since it is conducted within 45 minutes at a time specified by the teacher. The reform allows for this type of assessment to take the form of a task, not necessarily a written test, in order to assess a wider range of competencies. However, the use of tasks represents a significant change in practice, and teachers typically rely on knowledge-based tests when conducting this assessment.

Student portfolios, introduced in the 2014 reform, consist of a collection of tasks, often creative, practical and involving research, for which teachers award a portfolio assessment mark (AQAPUE, 2018[21]). Portfolio assessment is meant to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate mastery of a range of competencies, as distinct from only knowledge. This is very new to teachers and students in Albania, and ensuring portfolio assessment is conducted with fidelity to the intent of the reform remains a challenge.

Table 2.3. Main modes of classroom assessment in Albania

Grades 4 to 12

	Content	Frequency	Length	Recording and reporting
Continuous assessment	Written and oral work	At teachers' discretion, with a summative mark every term	Varies based on student work being assessed	Teacher logs; periodic report cards to students
Portfolio assessment	Selection of creative and research-oriented tasks and products	Summative mark every term	Variable	Periodic report cards to students
End-of-term assessment	Test or other summative activity	Every term	45 minutes	Periodic report cards to students

Source: (AQAPUE, 2018[21]) *Curriculum Guidelines*, Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth; (MoESY, 2018[10]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Continuous assessment is not clearly distinguished from formative assessment

In Albania, continuous assessment is described as a type of formative assessment in curriculum and assessment guidance documents. However, continuous assessment can serve both summative and formative functions (Muskin, 2017[22]). This conflation between the concept and practice of continuous assessment and that of formative assessment limits

the ability of teachers to use formative assessment effectively. For example, the Albanian assessment framework refers to assessment for learning as formative, while Albania's core curriculum documents refer to assessment for learning as continuous, which may lead to teachers and other stakeholders believing that the marking associated with continuous assessment is a formative assessment practice as such (AQAPUE, n.d.[19]; AQAPUE, 2014[23]; AQAPUE, 2016[24]).

For continuous assessment to indeed be formative, teachers should be using assessment results to provide feedback to students on how to improve and to shape instruction and plan future teaching (OECD, 2013[2]). In practice, teachers and principals reported to the OECD review team that teachers dutifully record a mark using symbols for each student – a continuous assessment practice – but there is little evidence that teachers use the results formatively.

Continuous assessment and end-of-term assessment in Albania serve primarily summative purposes

As part of continuous assessment in Albania, teachers will choose a particular oral or written assignment for which to award certain students a continuous assessment mark. This could be, for example, an oral response to a question posed during class or a written work students produce. Teachers may provide oral or written feedback to students' responses. End-of-term assessment, on the other hand, typically consists of a written test. As noted above, these tests are typically knowledge-based and do not cover a wide range of competencies. A summative mark is awarded for each instance of continuous assessment and for each end-of-term assessment.

Basic requirements for compiling a student portfolio are provided, but there are no quality standards and no clear alignment to competencies

Current guidance for portfolio assessment calls for the inclusion of at least three major tasks such as presentations, projects or written assignments, each of which should be aligned to competencies. Teachers have the freedom to select, in consultation with students, which tasks will be included in the student portfolio, as well as the criteria, including the weighting of each task, that will be used to evaluate the portfolio. One of the tasks should be a longer-term "curriculum project," which is meant to provide students with an extended opportunity to put competencies into practice and to integrate competencies from other learning areas (AQAPUE, 2018[21]). While teachers are provided with some examples of portfolio tasks and marking schemes for selected subject areas such as mathematics, there is no set of design principles or guidance provided on how to develop a high-quality task aligned to competencies. This is particularly important if portfolios are to go beyond a compendium of routine assignments to develop and assess a wider range of complex competencies (Conley and Darling-Hammond, 2013[25]). It is also important because implementing a high-quality system of portfolios is difficult. When well-implemented, portfolios can offer additional benefits such as opportunities to promote higher-order and metacognitive thinking and reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2017[26]). At present, there is little evidence that portfolio assessment in Albania is being used as a tool for students to reflect critically on their learning.

Albania uses descriptors in Grades 1 to 3 and a numerical scale in Grades 4 to 12

In Grades 1 through 3, summative marking by subject area at the end of each term is conducted using five levels of achievement. Teachers provide a descriptive mark along the five levels on the basis of student progress (see Table 2.4). Marks are accompanied by

written feedback on what the student is able to do at that level. The final descriptive mark is based on a weighted formula that takes into account students' classroom written and oral work and homework, projects and other creative activities and tasks, and test and quiz results (AQAPUE, 2018[21]). There are no marks provided for student progress on individual competencies.

At the end of each of the three terms in a school year, or roughly every three months, teachers of Grades 4 to 12 must report a numerical mark on a four to ten scale for each of the three modes of assessment, and this periodic reporting is referred to as "periodic assessment". Teachers calculate the final mark based on a weighted formula using the nine marks accumulated over the three terms for the three modes of assessment. Students receive a final mark along a four to ten scale, with five considered a passing mark. The marking of all student work and performance is in theory aligned to levels of achievement for individual competencies at a particular stage (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. Levels of student achievement in Albanian schooling

Grades 1-3		Grades 4-12	
Level	Associated descriptors	Level	Associated marks
I	Unsatisfactory achievement	I	4
II	Achievement that needs improvement	II	5, 6
III	Satisfactory achievement	III	7, 8
IV	Very satisfactory achievement	IV	9, 10*
V	Excellent achievement		

Note: *Albanian guidance documents suggest that Level IV and Level V in Grades 1-3 are conceptually aligned to marks of nine and ten respectively.
Source: MoESY (2019[15]) *Nivelet e Arritjes së Kompetencave [Levels of Achievement]*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

The system of summative marking and reporting used for periodic assessment and to generate the final report card presents several concerns. First, there is little accompanying written feedback to help students and parents understand the extent to which individual competencies have been mastered. Second, sample end-of-term tests show that teachers tend to assess only certain elements of the curriculum, primarily memorisation of knowledge and lower-level skills. Moreover, summative judgements made by teachers may not be reliable, as there are neither clear outcomes by grade level nor marked exemplars available that would help teachers determine the level of a student's achievement. Finally, allocating a summative mark for continuous assessment undermines its intended formative function.

Recording requirements are burdensome

New regulations for classroom assessment stemming from the 2014 curriculum reform require more frequent assessment, and each of the three modes of classroom assessment has recording requirements for teachers. Continuous assessment is particularly burdensome: marks are recorded onto a grid with the competency assessed, a description of how the student met the competency and the date of the assessment (AQAPUE, 2018[21]). Teachers may choose how many continuous assessment marks to record per term (AQAPUE, 2018[21]). In practice, as demonstrated by samples of completed continuous assessment grids provided to the OECD review team, teachers are entering continuous

assessment marks every 1-6 weeks. The records are checked regularly by principals as part of teacher appraisal, and they are made available when required by school inspections. However, this burdensome requirement serves only a compliance purpose, as records are not used to discuss how teachers use the results of continuous assessment to inform their teaching practice.

Reporting of student achievement is inconsistent and provides limited information on student achievement of competencies

In Albania, schools define their own policies for reporting on student achievement and progress to students, parents and other stakeholders based on the ministry's general guidelines. In Grades 1 to 3, guidelines indicate that descriptive marks and written feedback should note strengths and areas for improvement. Guidelines also stipulate that final numerical marks in Grades 4 through 12 should be accompanied by a description justifying the mark and expanding on the student's strengths with respect to the competencies in the subject area and key competencies (AQAPUE, 2018[21]).

While templates for reporting are provided by the ministry, their use is not standardised across schools in Albania. Samples of periodic report cards for Grades 4 and higher provided to the OECD review team show that report cards typically contain marks for each type of assessment in each subject. However, not all contain marks for individual competencies or written feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

Teachers in Albania do not receive adequate preparation on assessment

All teachers in Albania received some training on the assessment strategies found in the new curriculum and assessment frameworks, but training on assessment seems insufficient for addressing the challenges teachers face in this area. For example, teachers are not yet adept at writing competency-based test items and interpreting standardised assessment results. At the national level, some mandatory professional development on student assessment has been organised by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (formerly the Education Development Institute, see Chapter 1) in the former Regional Education Directorates (RED) and Education Offices (EO) (now regional directorates and local education offices) and for principals and teachers. Additionally, some RED/EOs have prioritised the area of analysing national assessment results and comparing them to classroom assessment results. However, mandatory national and regional professional development opportunities specific to assessment are minimal.

In Albania, teachers may choose to participate in professional development through professional learning networks. These networks include teachers of the same profile (e.g. teachers of mathematics) that meet at the regional level to discuss curriculum changes and national education priorities such as assessment (see Chapter 3). In schools, teachers receive limited support to develop their classroom assessment practices. In some cases, subject departments will discuss assessment-related topics such as what tasks will constitute the student portfolio, but the use of subject departments to support student classroom assessment is not systematic across Albanian schools.

The quality of training on assessment varies across initial teacher education programmes

There is heterogeneity in terms of the content and quality of initial teacher education programmes across initial teacher education providers, and the ministry currently has no mechanism such as accreditation criteria and guidelines in place for ensuring teachers are trained in how to use the assessment types required by the curriculum (see Chapter 3). For

example, based on evidence from the OECD mission, initial teacher education programmes do not typically provide training in psychometrics, leading to difficulties among teachers in developing competency-based test items and in understanding national assessment and examination results at a more granular level. The ministry is currently taking steps to ensure the quality of initial teacher education, including assessment modules, by creating common standards for curriculum content; however, it is unclear at this stage if the standards will be detailed enough to guide the development of quality assessment literacy modules.

National Examinations

Students in Albania take two examinations, the National Basic Education Examination at the end of compulsory education (end of Grade 9) and the State Matura Examination at the end of upper secondary education (end of Grade 12). These examinations certify the completion of their respective education levels and are required to enter the proceeding level, upper secondary education and tertiary education respectively. The 2019 versions of both examinations have been re-designed to reflect changes to the curriculum, with attempts to introduce more items focused on complex, higher-order tasks set in real-world contexts relevant to young people.

The National Basic Education Examination certifies completion of compulsory education but is not typically used for placement into upper secondary education

The National Basic Education Examination is mandatory at the end of lower secondary education. Students who pass the exam receive a basic education certificate, which is required for entry into upper secondary education. Students are tested in Albanian language, mathematics and foreign language. National minority students are assessed in their primary language, Albanian language, mathematics and, optionally, a foreign language. The exam contains multiple-choice and open-ended questions and is paper-based (see Table 2.5).

The distribution of scores on the National Basic Education Examination shows that the reporting scale adopted for the exam is, in general, working well for the Albanian language and mathematics tests. Nearly all students pass the minimum required level (category 4). Scores in Albanian language display a near normal distribution (MoESY, 2017[27]). The distribution of scores in mathematics also appears to be acceptable even though it shows a degree of positive skewness. The tests achieve relatively large score ranges, and the distribution of students across the six passing categories (4-10) appears adequate. The six passing categories used in Albania are comparable to reporting scales used in many OECD countries. In England, the GCSE has a reporting scale of 1-9, where 4 is considered a "standard pass" (Ofqual, 2018[28]).

Results of the National Basic Education Examination are not typically used to place students into general upper secondary schools. Instead, placement is based on the catchment area of each school, though students may enrol in a school outside their catchment area if there are spaces available. In a small number of specialised schools such as foreign language schools, only when there are more students that apply than spaces available do these schools set entrance criteria that may include National Basic Education Examination results and course marks. The National Basic Education Examination is not currently a barrier to entry into upper secondary education: the pass rate for all tests taken in 2017 was 99.2% (MoESY, 2017[27]).

While the examination has no impact on placement into general upper secondary education, it nevertheless exerts pressure for meeting expected learning standards upon completion of

basic education. For example, students in 9th Grade reported to the OECD review team that they felt nervous about passing the examination. In the months leading up to the exam, teachers focus class time on specific topics found in the examination's orientation programme, which is typically released in December each year. Teachers also offer free review sessions before and after the instructional day. Schools analyse their results to compare annual course marks with examination marks, identify strengths and challenges, and inform annual school plans (see Chapter 4).

The National Basic Education Examination is developed centrally but administered and marked at the regional level

The administration and scoring of the National Basic Education Examination is managed at the sub-national level by local education offices (previously by REDs and EOs). The Educational Services Centre (ESC) develops the tests and sends the tests and the answer keys to the local education offices. The latter are responsible for selecting and training test evaluators, who mark tests, according to national regulations. This includes providing training, in collaboration with regional directorates and the General Directorate for Pre-University Education, on using the answer key. Local education offices are responsible for the proper and secure conditions of testing and scoring. Students take the exam inside schools as designated by the local education office administering the exam. Regulations prohibit teachers from administering the exam to their own students. However, exam conditions such as the level of security and the behaviour of students (e.g. tardiness) tend to vary across testing centres in Albania. In order for results to be comparable, administration procedures and the quality of marking would need to be more consistent across testing centres. Administration and marking arrangements are subject to change with the new restructuring (see Chapter 1), and the implication for marking and administration of tests remains unclear at the time of drafting this report.

The quality of test evaluators and of marking for the National Basic Education Examination varies by testing centre

A commission within each local education office selects test evaluators, who are teachers, based on criteria laid out in national regulations for the National Basic Education Examination. These criteria include having a minimum of five years of teaching experience in the relevant subject, having been accurate and precise in previous exam evaluations, and having high scores in the last appraisal for promotion examination. However, these and other criteria are not sufficient to ensure teachers with a high level of competence in assessment are selected, and in some cases RED/EOs have recruited teachers who do not meet all the criteria. This is due in part to a lack of incentives: prior to 2019 teachers were not paid for their role as evaluators, and this role is not recognised in the teacher career structure.

There is no national process for quality control and auditing. For example, there is no nationally required training for teachers to become evaluators of the National Basic Education Examination, nor is there a standardised process for ensuring teachers have the required skills and knowledge to be high-quality evaluators. Indeed, internal transparency reports sent to the ministry from the ESC have noted significant variations in the quality of scoring across RED/EOs. Certain phenomena and discrepancies such as examination scores that are higher than course marks have been observed in some RED/EOs. Results of the National Basic Education Examination are thus not comparable at the national level and cannot be used for system monitoring.

Table 2.5. Albania's national examinations

	National Basic Education Examination	State Matura Examination[1]
Components	Albanian language Mathematics Foreign Language* * National minority students are assessed in the subjects of mother tongue, Albanian language, mathematics and, optionally, a foreign language	Albanian language and literature Mathematics Foreign language Elective, by programme: - General (choose 1 of 8) - Artistic (choose 1 of 3) - Vocational (choose 1 of 35)
Eligibility	Mandatory at the end of lower secondary in order to receive the basic education certificate	Mandatory at the end of upper secondary education in order to receive the State Matura Diploma, which certifies completion of upper secondary education and is required to apply to universities
Item development	Subject groups established by the ESC in collaboration with the ministry	Subject groups established by the ESC in collaboration with the ministry and the ministry responsible for vocational education
Question format	Multiple-choice and open-ended questions	Multiple-choice and open-ended questions
Grading	Points (50), which are converted into marks (4-10). Students fail if they accumulate less than 20% of the points on a test. The range of points corresponding to less than 20% is given a mark of 4.	Points (60), which are converted into marks (4-10). Students fail if they accumulate less than 20% of the points on a test. The range of points corresponding to less than 20% is give a mark of 4.
Marking	Teachers with possibly some training from the local education office; selection based on criteria set forth in national regulations	Teachers certified by the ESC; selection based on criteria set forth in national regulations
Primary purpose	Certification of completion of lower secondary education and provision of a basic education certificate	Certification of complete upper secondary education and provision with the State Matura Diploma Better quality and fairer selection of candidates for admission to higher education institutions
Reporting	Results are announced by the local education office no later than 15 (fifteen) days after each test. Every pupil has access to see only his/her score. The local education office sends the results in written and electronic forms to the ESC. The ESC prepares a public report on students' achievements. This public report is distributed to all regional directorates, local education offices and schools.	Results are published on the ESC and the ministry website no later than 15 (fifteen) days after each test. Each student has access to see only his grade/score. The ESC sends the results to all regional directorates and local education offices in written and electronic forms. They then send them to the schools to announce them. The ESC prepares a public report, which it presents to all the interested parties. This public report is distributed to all regional directorates, local education offices and schools.

Note: [1]Students take a version of each non-elective test based on the programme in which they are enrolled.
Source: MoESY (2018[10]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania,* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana*;* MoESY (2018[29]), *Organizimin dhe Zhvillimin e Provimeve Kombëtare të Maturës Shtetërore 2019 [On the Organization and Development of the National Examinations of 2019 State Matura],* Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

State Matura Examination results certify completion of upper secondary education

Students must pass the State Matura Examination at the end of upper secondary education in order to graduate from upper secondary education. Students who pass the exam receive a State Matura Diploma, which is required for entry into university. Starting in 2019, students take three compulsory tests - Albanian language and literature, mathematics and foreign language - and one mandatory elective test, to be chosen from lists of electives according to programme type (i.e. general, artistic or vocational) (see Table 2.5). The content tested on the compulsory tests is different for each programme type. Prior to 2019, students were required to take two elective tests, and students in general upper secondary programmes could choose from 21 elective tests, as compared to 8 as of 2019. The pass

rate across all State Matura tests in the main examination session in June 2017 was about 95% (MoESY, 2017[30]). Since about 79% of public upper secondary students attended general upper secondary programmes in 2016-2017, this review will focus on the State Matura tests this majority of the upper secondary population takes (AQAPUE, 2017[31]).

State Matura tests are designed to discriminate between levels of performance, but they include few items with authentic contexts relevant to learners

Albania's State Matura Examination is a paper-based test that includes a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. In 2019, the number of points possible increased from 50 points for obligatory tests and from 40 points for electives to 60 points on each and every test. The aim of this increase in points was to better discriminate between levels of performance of individual students, an important feature for the purposes of tertiary education selection.

In 2019, Albania's national examinations were re-designed in an effort to bring them into alignment with the new curriculum, in particular by including items that assess application of knowledge and skills in a real-world context. Research suggests that competency-based assessments should measure whether students are able to use and adapt knowledge and skills to perform meaningful tasks in different and new situations, and that competencies tested should be clearly defined (Hipkins, 2007[32]; McClarty and Gaertner, 2015[33]). However, in Albania, test items from the 2019 State Matura Examination reveal that the exam does not yet reflect the types of applied, authentic problems demanded by the new curriculum. For example, the mathematical competencies set out in the 2018-2019 examination programme suggest test items should include authentic contexts, but most test items reviewed by the review team remain abstract and formal rather than concrete and applied (MoESY, 2019[34]; MoESY, n.d.[35]; AQAPUE, 2016[24]). Moreover, while some items on the State Matura mathematics test are set in a real-world context, such as finding the distance between two boats as they appear from a lighthouse, students are not asked to solve practical problems they may encounter as young citizens.

The administration and scoring of the State Matura Examination is secure

The administration and scoring of the State Matura tests is tightly controlled and monitored by the ESC. Students test in 256 police-protected schools, and the names of those who have access to tests are recorded. Test marking is also tightly secured. Copies are labelled with an ID number instead of a student name and are marked independently by two evaluators in six ESC-run centres. Disagreements between the two scores are resolved by a third evaluator.

Exam evaluators are carefully selected, certified and trained to be able to both write and mark test items. Teachers are selected to be evaluators based on similar criteria as for the National Basic Education Examination, though for the State Matura evaluators must be certified as evaluators by the ESC. Teachers are certified by participating in training and taking a test.

The ESC sends to the ministry a report that provides an analysis of the exam administration process and shows any variations in the quality of scoring. The report names specific schools if there are any discrepancies between, for example, annual marks and State Matura results. In addition, the Minister of Education appoints a national committee that monitors and analyses any issues in the implementation of the State Matura Examination. Issues are then analysed by the school, local education offices and other institutions. There are reportedly some consequences based on these analyses and action may be taken by the

ministry and other institutions. However, there is no clear policy regarding consequences or requirements to take action.

State Matura results are used as criteria for entry into Albanian universities

In order to be eligible to apply to a university in Albania, a student must achieve a minimum score according to a formula weighting of the State Matura Examination and upper secondary school course marks. These criteria are decided by the Council of Ministers annually, and the minimum score was set to 6.5 for 2019-2020 admission, up from 6.0 in 2018-2019 (MoESY, 2019[36]). This will likely increase the pressure on students to perform well on the State Matura. Universities in Albania are permitted to set their own additional criteria for admission, including creating their own formula for ranking students and requiring specific elective tests. Upper secondary students in general programmes often choose electives based on the recommendations provided by specific universities on gaining entry to their university or specific programmes. For example, applying to an economics department or programme could require students to take the State Matura economics test. Most universities do not set additional entrance examinations, which shows a certain level of trust in the State Matura process.

The negative backwash effect of the State Matura on teaching and learning is limited

Upper secondary teachers reported during the OECD mission that in their classes they emphasise topics found in the State Matura Examination orientation programme, which is aligned to the curriculum programme for the relevant subject area. Upon its release in December each year, teachers share the examination orientation programme with students so that students can identify and share with them their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also use questions from previous State Matura tests to assess their students, though they receive little training on developing test items themselves. Finally, teachers provide free extra classes outside the instructional day for certain State Matura subject tests. There does not seem to be a widespread culture of teaching to the test or test tutoring in Albania as compared to other countries in the region.

National student assessment agencies

The ESC oversees the State Matura Examination and provides guidance on the implementation of the VANAF and the National Basic Education Examination

The ESC, established in 2015 under the responsibility of the ministry and preceded by the National Examination Agency (2010-2015), is the institution responsible for national and international assessments and examinations in Albania. The ESC is fully responsible for the design, administration, quality assurance and analysis of the State Matura Examination. However, responsibilities for the National Basic Education Examination and the VANAF are shared between the ESC and the local education offices, and to a limited extent with the new General Directorate for Pre-University Education and regional directorates. This has consequences, as noted above, for the reliability of the results of these tests at the national level. The ESC has little involvement in other forms of assessment such as classroom assessment. The responsibility for developing resources and training on assessment lies with the Quality Assurance Agency (previously the Education Development Institute), though as noted above these have not been adequate.

While the ESC has staff with psychometric expertise and experience, it has limited human and financial resources. The ESC has 44 employees (2018), as compared to a team of over 200 people (2018) in Georgia's National Assessment and Examinations Centre (NAEC) (Li et al., 2019[37]). This limits its capacity to take on greater responsibilities such as improving the reliability of the VANAF and the National Basic Education Examination or providing increased capacity-building support directly to local education offices and schools. The ESC envisions improving its testing capacity through digital scoring and computer-based assessment. This will require a significant investment in infrastructure and resourcing in the ESC and in testing centres.

Policy issues

Albania's assessment framework is relatively advanced as compared to those in other Western Balkan countries, and also to frameworks in many OECD member states. Albania has introduced new approaches to classroom assessment, encouraging teachers to monitor continuously the learning of their students and use portfolios of student work as a means to assess competencies across the curriculum. The State Matura Examination is well trusted and being reformed to reinforce the curriculum's emphasis on applied learning and higher-order skills. These are strong foundations upon which Albania can now build as it seeks to enhance the educational value of assessments and examinations.

The first priority is to increase the support provided to teachers to create more authentic assessment tasks and use assessment results formatively to guide teaching and learning in the classroom. The curriculum implies fundamental changes in practice. At present, teachers in Albania have limited training in assessment and very few practical tools to draw upon. They also lack clear guidance on how students should progress towards end of cycle learning expectations, and have no reliable external data they can use to benchmark their own judgements.

A second priority is to improve the quality of national examinations. Core criteria for quality include high standards of security and reliability. It is essential that Albania bring the National Basic Education Examination into line with the State Matura Examination in these critical respects. Albania also needs to go further in improving the test design of both examinations so that they reinforce the expectations for student learning set out in the curriculum. This means more emphasis on higher-order cognitive skills and the application of knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems.

Policy issue 2.1. Supporting teachers to make better use of assessment to improve student learning

Albania has introduced an ambitious assessment framework (2015) that calls for practices that compare favourably with practices in OECD countries and are more advanced than those observed in other Western Balkans countries. The framework encourages teachers to assess their students regularly and use the results to inform teaching and learning. It sets an expectation that teachers will use innovative assessment practices such as student portfolio and projects to assess the competencies found in the national curriculum framework, which are higher-order in nature and include transversal skills.

While teachers generally comply with regulations to engage in assessment practices such as continuous assessment and student portfolio assessment, their ability to use these practices to assess a wider range of student competences and use results to improve learning remains limited. For example, teachers are complying with the requirement to provide a

continuous assessment mark but are not using the results formatively as envisioned by the policy on continuous assessment. Several factors have contributed to this limited shift in classroom assessment practices. At the national level, rules and regulations are sometimes unclear and require further clarification to help teachers incorporate the practices found in the new framework into their pedagogy. For example, while learning outcomes are defined by stage, very little if any guidance is provided to teachers on the learning outcomes their students should attain by the end of each grade. Some national policies such as teacher appraisal also contradict the developmental intent of the national assessment framework and continue to reinforce a predominantly summative assessment culture in classrooms. Most importantly, teachers in Albania need additional in-school support and guidance to understand the new assessment framework and implement it in their classrooms. This will require significant changes to how teachers are trained to assess students.

Recommendation 2.1.1. Revise and further clarify national assessment policies

Several gaps in assessment policies have limited understanding about the intent of these policies among teachers and hampered effective implementation. First, there are no nationally defined learning outcomes by grade level that teachers and students can work towards, which means teachers do not have a reference point against which to form a valid and reliable assessment of where students are in their learning. Second, there are no examples of marked student work or external benchmarks to signal what achievement at various levels looks like. This is particularly important as Albania is making significant demands of its teachers, including the difficult task of assessing in a reliable and valid manner complex constructs such as critical thinking. Third, the definition of formative assessment is unclear and inconsistent, which has contributed to the confusion of continuous assessment with formative assessment. Lastly, this confusion is further reinforced by the heavy recordkeeping requirement for teachers and other policies such as teacher appraisal and school evaluation, which serve to monitor compliance with recordkeeping rather than the quality of teachers' assessment of and feedback to students. These gaps and contradicting policies need to be addressed in order to provide clarity to teachers on what is expected of them.

Define expected learning outcomes by grade level

The Quality Assurance Agency should develop learning outcomes at the national level for each grade. These should be aligned to the existing learning outcomes and competencies by stage. Nationally defined learning outcomes by grade would provide teachers with a point of reference for assessing the progress of their students in a particular grade level. It would also help teachers diagnose gaps in learning prior to the end of a curriculum stage. In Serbia, for example, the new competency-based curriculum being rolled out since 2018 includes learning outcomes for each grade in order to support teachers in understanding how their students might reach the end of cycle learning standards (Maghnouj et al., 2020[38]).

Provide teachers with examples of student work

In addition to descriptions of learning expectations, materials such as examples, including marked exemplars, of student work can be used to demonstrate what achievement of learning outcomes at different levels would look like. Initially, the Quality Assurance Agency should work with experienced teachers to develop examples of student work linked to curriculum outcomes and levels of achievement. These should be made available online. To build understanding, organised groups of teachers should then be involved in the development of these examples. Teachers should be encouraged to work in subject teams

and within the professional learning networks to enrich the initial base of examples, with curation conducted by experienced teachers. They should also be encouraged to develop examples of how they come together in schools and in the professional learning networks to discuss students' work in relation to outcomes.

Provide teachers with disaggregated VANAF results to inform teaching and learning

External benchmarks of student achievement such as results in national examinations or assessments can support teachers in making accurate judgements about student progress, as they provide a reliable point of reference for expected or adequate progress in particular marks and subjects (OECD, 2013[2]). These can be particularly helpful when the capacity of teachers is low. Results from the VANAF, once their reliability has been improved, can be used to provide such external benchmarks (see Chapter 5). To do this, the ESC should provide detailed information on the average achievement of students nationally and regionally in relation to specific outcomes so that teachers can compare their students' performance. The ESC should also release items where students on average perform well and perform poorly so that teachers can integrate them into their own assessments. In addition, the ESC should provide teachers with student-level data reports. These should contain information by test item such as the individual student's performance, mean student performance, the competencies assessed and an analysis of common errors.

Create a national policy on formative assessment

The distinct potential of formative assessment remains largely untapped among Albanian teachers. For example, while teachers in Albania have adopted the recordkeeping aspect of continuous assessment, there is little evidence that teachers use the results of continuous assessment to make changes to their instruction and lesson plans. Indeed, while the national assessment framework has set as a goal that classroom assessment be used to inform teacher practice and to improve student learning, the framework does not explain what this means practically. To make the formative assessment policy more tangible for teachers, the Quality Assurance Agency should:

- **Develop a simple visual that explains how teachers are expected to use assessment results in their teaching practice**. This could take the form of a step-by-step diagram or figure that guides teachers in operationalising formative assessment. For example, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) provides teachers with a formative assessment cycle, among other formative assessment resources, that includes key questions and steps for using student test results to inform their practice (NZCER, n.d.[39]).
- **Create a formative assessment toolkit for teachers** that includes examples of how to adapt lesson plans based on assessment results, feedback templates and tools to implement diagnostic assessments (see Recommendation 2.1.2). Concrete examples of formative assessment that have been successfully implemented by peer teachers, in particular, can help teachers incorporate formative assessment into their teaching (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013[40]). In Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has designed materials to support teachers and schools in expanding their assessment toolkit. These include classroom video footage, samples of student work with teacher commentary, reflection tools and checklists for reviewing individual teacher and whole school assessment practice (OECD, 2013[2]).

- **Help teachers provide regular feedback to students.** High-quality, effective classroom feedback can accelerate learning and improve educational outcomes (Wiliam, 2010[41]). Research suggests that in order to be effective, feedback should provide students with advice on how to correct errors, misconceptions or gaps, rather than simply providing information on areas of strength or weakness (Farai, Mapaire and Chindanya, 2018[42]). Formative feedback helps students understand where they are in their learning and can be used as a means to build agency and metacognitive awareness. The Quality Assurance Agency should develop resources such as videos or written examples of formative feedback, as well as summaries of research on strategies and tools, in order to support teachers in providing effective feedback, particularly oral feedback. These resources should help teachers involve students as active participants in their assessment and should guide them in providing feedback that is specific, descriptive and constructive (Looney, 2011[43]). Resources should also describe techniques and strategies on how teachers can gather feedback from students and use this information to adjust their teaching (Kitchen et al., 2019[44]). In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency should provide further guidance on developing assessment criteria for success (or rubrics), as well as exemplars of good success criteria. This would build on the limited guidance that is already provided for developing portfolio assessment rubrics. Teachers can use criteria for success to provide feedback on areas of success and areas for improvement, while students can use the criteria to engage in self-assessment and peer assessment (OECD, 2005[45]). Finally, to support teachers in developing and discussing their feedback strategies, they will require access to professional development opportunities (e.g. in subject teams and via the professional learning networks), as well as access to sustained support from school leaders (see Chapter 3).
- **Set up a communication campaign** to explain what formative assessment is to school staff, students and parents. Education stakeholders in Albania broadly see the purpose of assessment as summative, and there is a need to shift mind-sets and expectations about assessment's formative role in promoting learning and growth. Parents and students will likely be resistant at first to concrete changes in the culture of assessment such as reducing the number of marks and giving more time to feedback and learner-led review. Teachers and school leaders, too, might question the time required for engaging in certain formative tasks such as increasing the amount of written descriptive feedback, in relation to mastery of competencies, students receive. This major change in the culture of assessment needs to be related to school staff, in particular teachers, so as to build ownership and to provide a "language" to communicate the change to parents and students. Strategies for communicating these changes might include meetings with the school community, promotional videos, pamphlets and other informational materials. For example, to communicate changes in the curriculum under Mexico's *Nuevo Modelo Educativo* reform, the Mexican government launched a website with videos, infographics and documents explaining the changes (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017[46]). In Hong Kong (China), the government held seminars with reporters to discuss the reform philosophy early in the design phase of the reform. The government was also in constant contact with chief editors of major media outlets in order to further engage the public in the reform (OECD, 2011[47]).

Reduce the frequency of marking

As well as providing a summative mark at the end of each period, teachers are required to keep records of each instance of continuous assessment by recording student marks in their class diary, which contradicts the primary formative purpose of continuous assessment. Constant recorded grading reinforces a narrowly summative approach to assessment, where the mark is seen as the main aim rather than assessment being embedded as a means to improve the teaching and learning process. Teachers and schools leaders also report that this requirement is burdensome, taking time away from making changes to instructional practices and meeting with students. To remove these barriers, the ministry should:

- **Set a maximum of six marks per year that are used to calculate the final mark**, which might consist of three end-of-term assessments and three portfolio assessments. These six assessments should summarise achievement against all competencies for the specified subject area, and marks on these assessments should be accompanied by written descriptive feedback. To ensure continuous assessment is used for formative purposes, the practice of reporting a continuous assessment mark every term and factoring in continuous assessment as part of the final mark should be abolished. Teachers could provide marks against assessment criteria as part of formative assessment, but any formative assessment marks should not be factored into the final mark.
- **Help teachers to integrate formative feedback into their daily assessment.** As noted above, effective feedback can have a positive impact on educational outcomes. Quality oral feedback and peer discussion help students understand their progress and identify areas of strength and weakness. Written marking of tasks can also be used to correct errors, suggest alternative responses and help students understand where they need to focus in order to progress in their learning. Furthermore, written feedback can be used to identify what a student has done well and where there are gaps in understanding (Victoria State Government, 2018[48]). It provides an opportunity to provide feedback on the student's work, as well as on the work process. Finally, positive evaluative feedback using symbols such as smiley faces or stickers with younger children can be used to reinforce desired behaviours such as demonstrating effort or particular attitudes, though using such behaviour management tools requires teachers to have adequate training and support (Evertson, 2013[49]; Tunstall and Gsipps, 1996[50]).

Better align teacher appraisal and school evaluation with the expectations of the assessment framework

Other monitoring and accountability policies, both internal and external to schools, should be used to help reinforce the intent of the assessment framework and provide clarity on what is expected of teachers. Regular teacher appraisal includes the assessment of the teacher's annual plan, but currently this focuses on elements such as students' estimated and actual grade point averages rather than examples of assessment methods, qualitative feedback or how data is used to inform next steps for the teacher and the learner. Similarly, the portfolio teachers are required to maintain includes only quantitative assessment data and administrative material such as training certificates, rather than evidence of teacher practice (see Chapter 3). While Albania's school evaluation framework dedicates one of seven fields to student assessment, and includes detailed indicators and descriptions of what a school's practices would look like at each rating level, there is no requirement that the assessment field be covered in every full school inspection (AQAPUE, 2011[51]).

This means that many schools are inspected without in-depth evaluation and feedback on their student assessment practices (see Chapter 4). The ministry should revise policies on school evaluation and regular appraisal to help teachers improve their assessment practice:

- **Include examples of student assessments in teacher plans and portfolios**. Rather than including exclusively administrative material, teacher portfolios should include student assessment examples, as is the practice in many OECD countries (OECD, 2013[2]). In Chile, for example, as part of the teacher performance evaluation system, teachers must compile a teacher performance portfolio that includes an example of a written assessment, the associated marking rubric, an interpretation of student results and a description of the feedback given to students to improve future learning (Santiago et al., 2013[52]).
- **Ensure that school principals review the quality of assessment and feedback provided to students during the teacher appraisal and discuss with teachers how to improve their practice during their appraisal feedback discussion**. These elements should be included in the appraisal guidelines currently being developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (see Chapter 3). In addition, school principals will need to be trained to assess the quality of teachers' assessment practice, and this training should be part of the instructional leadership training provided by the School of Directors (see Chapter 4). Finally, the ability to assess teachers' assessment practice should be incorporated into the ongoing revision of the school leadership standards.
- **Define a set of mandatory, core indicators to be used in every full school inspection, and include within these indicators on the quality of assessment practices**. Inspectors should review examples of assessment during the school visit and discuss with teachers how they develop assessment material, provide feedback to students and use assessment in a formative manner. Inspectors should also look at how the principal is supporting teachers and the school as a whole to develop their assessment practices. This includes helping to make time to engage in professional learning exercises on formative practices such as providing feedback and on newer practices such as developing portfolio tasks. In Scotland (United Kingdom), for example, the school evaluation framework includes the indicator "teaching, learning and assessment", which is further detailed along the theme of "effective use of assessment."The illustration of a "very good" evaluation in this area includes using a variety of assessment approaches, ensuring evidence is valid and reliable, reporting on progress using reliable evidence and engaging in moderation (Education Scotland, 2015[53]).

Recommendation 2.1.2. Provide teachers with guidelines and tools to help them improve their assessment practice

In order to help teachers engage with the curriculum reform and employ the new approaches envisaged under the assessment framework, the Quality Assurance Agency already provides some guidelines, including examples and templates such as sample portfolio tasks and lesson plan templates. However, the Quality Assurance Agency, along with the ESC, needs to give significantly more attention to developing quality assessment resources in order to improve regular classroom assessment practice in schools. This includes providing further guidance on developing high-quality portfolio tasks and on using portfolio as a tool for student self-reflection. Teachers should also be provided with guidance on developing and using diagnostic assessments, as well as on using the results effectively. Many countries have found diagnostic assessment a useful tool for focusing teachers on each individual student, improving reliability of judgements and making sure

teachers focus on core elements of the curriculum. Finally, providing feedback is an area where teachers require additional support (as noted above). Teachers would benefit from a template for providing written feedback to students when reporting on learning progress.

Provide further guidelines and tools for teachers on portfolio assessment

Teachers are free to develop their own portfolio tasks and criteria for marking these tasks, but they have not received adequate supports or training in how to develop high-quality tasks and criteria. At present, portfolio tasks focus on basic skills and knowledge rather than on higher-order skils that are applied in real-world contexts relevant to young people. In addition, assessment criteria sometimes consist of lists of focus areas to be assessed, such as "presentation of work and creative ability", rather than rubrics with clear and specific indicators for levels of achievement along each criterion.

Guidelines from the Quality Assurance Agency should describe the elements of a quality assessment task, such as ensuring that the task: is set in a real-world context meaningful to young people, allows for student choice, sets out realistic and feasible task requirements, and requires students to engage in critical thinking rather than simply knowledge-recall (Cohen, 1995[54]; Perlman, 2003[55]). The Quality Assurance Agency should also provide guidance to teachers for developing assessment criteria in the form of a rubric, which should be aligned to the target learning outcomes and include a description of performance at multiple levels for each criterion (Brown and Mevs, 2012[56]). Tools need to be matched with training and guidance on how to use them, as developing reliable performance-based tasks and rubrics can be particularly challenging.

Portfolio assessment can also be used to promote student self-reflection on their learning and to demonstrate achievement of key competencies for lifelong learning, such as learning to learn and communication and expression, that may otherwise be difficult to assess (Danielson and Abrutyn, 1997[57]; AQAPUE, 2014[14]). However, there is currently no reflection component in portfolio assessment nor a requirement for students to make a presentation. To promote the achievement and assessment of key competencies for lifelong learning and to promote student self-reflection the ministry might consider the introduction of a portfolio defence, possibly at key moments such as the end of particular curriculum stages (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. Innovation in portfolio assessment: portfolio defence

At Envision Schools in California, United States, students are required to defend their portfolio in 10th Grade and 12th Grade, whereby they present to a panel a selection of works in different subject areas and argue how they have mastered the targeted learning expectations. The panel is typically composed of the student's advisor, another student and about two additional teachers.

The process of portfolio defence starts when students gather their most relevant certified projects to compose their portfolio work and presentation. These certified projects are performance assessment tasks completed in each subject, around twice a year. Through their performance assessments, students are expected to demonstrate mastery of subject-area standards, core academic competencies such as inquiry and creative expression, and 21st century leadership skills such as communication and critical thinking.

Self-reflection is also an essential component of the portfolio defence. Students are required to reflect upon their learning and the learning process, which includes a description of their academic achievements, how they were able to succeed and how they overcame challenges. Students must prepare written reflections that accompany each of the certified projects composing their portfolio.

These reflections are meant to demonstrate how they apply 21st century leadership skills to their work.

In addition, students in 12th Grade are required to present a college and career readiness plan using academic projects and personal reflections on topics such as life experiences and goals as evidence to support their plans. This stimulates them to think critically about their own future, their growth as lifelong learners and the impact of their personal and professional choices.

To mark the portfolio defence, the panel employs a scoring rubric. Students must achieve at least the proficient level in order to pass the portfolio defence, which is required to graduate. Evaluators assign a score of emerging, developing, proficient or advanced in the following domains:

- Mastery of knowledge
- Application of knowledge
- Metacognition
- Presentation skills
- Performance after questions and comments from the panel

Portfolio defence evaluators regularly take part in professional learning to assist them with scoring calibration. These training sessions simulate real portfolio defence experiences. Teachers observe a student's practice defence and discuss how they would grade students on each domain. The training allows for teachers to discuss areas of disagreement and to improve the accuracy and consistency of scoring.

Research suggests that the Envision Schools approach to fostering deeper learning, which includes the use of portfolios, has had positive effects on student outcomes. One study has found that compared to traditional high schools, students from schools such as Envision Schools have reported higher levels of collaboration skills, academic engagement, motivation to learn and self-efficacy.

Sources: Maier (2019[58]), *Performance Assessment Profile: Envision Schools,* Learning Policy Institute, www.learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/cpac (accessed on 25 September 2019); American Institutes for Research (2016[59]), *What Is Deeper Learning, and Why Is It Important? Results From the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes,* AIR, https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Deeper-Learning-Summary-Updated-August-2016.pdf (accessed on 25 September 2019); Peterson et al. (2018[60]), *Understanding Innovative Pedagogies: Key Themes to Analyse New Approaches to Teaching and Learning,* OECD Education Working Papers, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9f843a6e-en.

Develop diagnostic assessment tools for teachers

Diagnostic assessments, a type of formative assessment, are often used in OECD countries at the beginning of a unit of study to identify a baseline of students' prior knowledge, strengths, weaknesses and learning needs and to inform teacher planning and instruction (OECD, 2013[2]). In France, for example, students who enter primary school (*cours préparatoire*) are evaluated in French language and mathematics as part of a national diagnostic evaluation (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, n.d.[61]). In Albania, students are progressing through school without meeting basic competencies, and teachers do not have access to diagnostic resources to identify gaps in learning as they emerge.

Teachers in Albania should be mandated to conduct diagnostic assessments in all grades, and the ESC should provide teachers with sample diagnostic questions for each grade level. These should be accompanied by response grids and, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency, guidelines on how to interpret results and provide feedback. For some key transition grades such as Grades 1, 5 and 9, the ESC can provide fully

standardised diagnostic assessments for teachers to use in assessing the achievement level of their students. The ESC, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency, will also need to provide tools for using diagnostic assessment results to inform lesson and unit plans before the start of a course or unit and to tailor instruction to meet individual student needs. These may include guides for engaging in item-analysis to identify errors and misconceptions, as well as case studies and examples of how teachers can collaborate to share strategies on differentiating instruction on a particular topic or concept (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018[62]; National Center on Intensive Intervention, n.d.[63]; Ministry of Education of New Zealand, n.d.[64]). Teachers should also be encouraged to take into account data from the VANAF assessment in Grade 5 and from the newly introduced grade 3 assessment this review recommends (see Chapter 5).

Help teachers provide better feedback to students on their progress

The ministry should also provide schools with a revised student report card template. Research suggests that progress reporting documentation should provide information on students' progress, strengths, areas for improvement, any sources of concern and recommendations for further learning (OECD, 2013[2]). Report card samples provided to the OECD review team indicate that in grades four and higher marks for each of the three modes of assessment are always reported for each subject area. Some report cards also include an achievement rating for each competency. Written feedback, however, is missing from many report cards. Moreover, when written feedback is provided, it often highlights strengths with respect to learning outcomes but does not provide feedback on how to improve.

The report card template should include spaces to report, for each subject: results of continuous assessments noting the competencies or learning outcomes targeted, scores on the three end-of-term assessments, scores on the three assessed portfolio tasks, the final mark and written feedback. The Quality Assurance Agency should develop guidelines on written feedback. For example, in the State of Victoria (Australia), the Department of Education and Training advises that, in their written comments, teachers use plain language that is easy to understand and include elements such as specific areas of strength and challenge, what students can do to continue learning and how parents can assist (Department of Education and Training, Victoria State Government, 2019[65]).These elements are included in a checklist that teachers can refer to as they develop written feedback (Department of Education and Training, Victoria State Government, n.d.[66]). In France, the *bilan périodique*, a periodic reporting document and constituent part of the *livret scolaire unique*, a progress reporting logbook containing student achievement results from primary school through lower secondary school, contains descriptive feedback and a mark or level of achievement for both transversal and subject-specific areas of learning (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4. Student report cards in France: the *"livret scolaire unique"*

The *livret scolaire unique* is an individual student report card that contains the results of teachers' evaluations of the student for all years of compulsory education. The intent behind the *livret scolaire unique* is to facilitate regular monitoring of students' progress and to provide students and their families with information on how students are meeting learning expectations. The *livret scolaire unique* is digital and can be fully accessed online by families and teachers. This allows for a single report card to follow the student across school cycles and in cases where the student may change schools or teachers.

The *livret scolaire unique* is composed of the *bilan de fin de cycle* (end of cycle review) and the *bilan périodique* (periodic review), as well as any school certificates (such as first aid training) the student has obtained.

The *bilan de fin de cycle* is developed at the end of each of the three school cycles in compulsory education. Teachers rate students along four levels of mastery for each of eight components of learning expectations all students are expected to meet by the end of compulsory education. These learning expectations are known as the Common Core of Knowledge, Skills and Culture. They include transversal competencies such as learning to learn and problem solving. Teachers evaluate students' level of mastery based on an analysis of student achievement throughout the learning cycle. Teachers also provide short descriptive feedback and advice on how a student can achieve better learning outcomes in the following cycle.

The *bilan périodique* reports on a student's progress in each subject taught over a specific period of time, typically every three months. After stating the main elements of the subject's programme, teachers are expected to briefly describe the student's main difficulties and achievements. At the primary level, teachers evaluate students against the learning objectives set for that subject using a 4-level scale: not achieved, partially achieved, achieved or exceeded. At the secondary level, the 4-level scale is replaced by a marking system (0-20). The *bilan périodique* also includes a section for communication between schools and families. There, teachers are expected to write about a student's habits and behaviours, including punctuality, attendance, participation in class and compliance with the school's regulations. Families can request a meeting with teachers should they have any questions regarding the elements of the report card.

Source: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse (2017[67]), *Le Livret Scolaire* [School Report Card] (accessed on 6 March 2018); Académie Caen (2016[68]), *LSU: Livret Scolaire Unique, Le Suivi Pédagogique de l'élève,* https://www.accaen.fr/mediatheque/communication/actualites/2016/12/presentation_LSU_Caen.pdf (accessed on 25 September 2019).

Recommendation 2.1.3. Ensure that teachers have access to quality training on assessment and incentives to participate in such training

Teachers need additional guidance and support in developing the assessment competencies required by the new curriculum. Teaching standards in Albania are not differentiated by career level and thus do not specify what novice teachers should know and be able to do with respect to student assessment. Initial teacher education programmes do not always cover the new approaches to assessment promoted by Albania's national assessment framework. For in-service teachers, continuous professional development is limited and takes place primarily in seminar format through the professional learning networks (see Chapter 3). Subject teams in schools meet regularly to discuss their practice, which includes assessment, but they do not have access to resources that would enable them to work together meaningfully to improve practice. Albania should include in its teaching standards the assessment literacy competencies expected from teachers at different career levels and emphasise developing assessment knowledge and skills in initial teacher education programmes. The ministry should also provide resources that promote meaningful in-school collaboration and provide supports specific to assessment such as mandatory and free training and online resources.

Provide clear guidance for preparation on assessment in initial teacher education

While student assessment is a subject included in all initial teacher education programmes in Albania, there is no quality assurance process to ensure that key areas of teacher practice in the area of assessment are covered in these programmes. It is thus unclear if all initial

teacher education programmes in Albania are preparing their students on how to apply some of the most innovative aspects of the assessment framework, such as continuous assessment and portfolio assessment. Programmes still use primarily a knowledge-based and didactic approach to preparing teachers rather than an applied, competency-based and student-oriented approach, the latter approach being better suited for acquiring practical assessment competencies and learning effective ways to design assessments and use results (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[69]). In order to improve the quality of initial teacher education on assessment, the ministry should consider:

- **Including key design features of quality assessment preparation as part of accreditation criteria in provider guidelines.** For example, in New South Wales (Australia) the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) (now the New South Wales Education Standards Authority) identified 24 key elements in the area of assessment that describe the qualities of beginning teachers and provide a framework for what should be covered in initial education programmes (BOSTES, 2016[70]). These elements include: knowing the purpose of formative and summative assessment, as well as how to use both in the classroom; applying concepts such as validity and reliability in the development of assessment tasks and activities; knowing how to improve reliability, such as through moderation; having sufficient data literacy to be able to use results from large-scale assessments to improve student learning; and understanding the importance of developing criteria for evaluating performance on assessments at different levels.
- **Clearly defining the assessment competencies for graduates of initial education programmes**, as part of the differentiated teaching standards this review recommends (see Chapter 3). These should be aligned with the accreditation criteria in provider guidelines (see above). In Ireland, for example, guidelines on required components of initial teacher education programmes define outcomes that are based on competencies for newly qualified teachers (see Chapter 3). In Australia, competencies for novice teachers (or "Graduate" level teachers) are defined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011[71]).For example, the standards call for teachers to demonstrate their understanding of a variety of assessment approaches such as diagnostic, summative and formative assessment, as well as to understand how assessment moderation can help teachers make consistent and comparable judgements.
- **Providing opportunities for practical experience in designing and implementing assessments.** Some of this experience can be provided within initial teacher education programmes themselves, as has been done through Australia's Assessment and Mentoring Program (AMP) (Jenkinson and Benson, 2016[72]). In the AMP, students in their final year of pre-service teaching courses mentor second year students, assessing their lesson plans and engaging in a dialogue about their teaching. In addition, mentors work together to design a lesson plan assessment tool, they engage in moderation, and they discuss with each other their work with mentees. A university AMP coordinator also functions as a mentor for mentors, engaging in moderation with mentors, providing feedback and troubleshooting areas of difficulty.

Provide mandatory and free training on key elements of the assessment framework

Assessment literacy is a priority training area in Albania, but teachers who have important weaknesses in this area are not identified systematically and do not receive additional training to help reach a minimum level of competency. Teachers who are facing major challenges in the area of assessment should receive free and mandatory professional development. This could include a seminar to review key concepts and practices and an in-school project, with mentorship, to implement the techniques learnt. In those cases where sustained follow-up is needed, an external assessment expert who can serve as a coach can also be assigned.

School principals should be responsible for identifying the learning needs of teachers in the area of assessment, and for ensuring that those who do not meet a minimum level of competency receive additional training and coaching. Student assessment should be a mandatory area of regular appraisal and teachers and school principals should set annual objectives for improving student assessment and review progress in this area. To carry out this role, school principals will need substantial support on how to appraise the quality of teacher assessment practices, as well as other elements of teaching quality (see Chapter 3).

Encourage in-school teacher collaborative learning on assessment

International research suggests that the kinds of learning opportunities that are most effective at improving teaching competence are job-embedded, collaborative and sustained over time (Goe, Biggers and Croft, 2012[73]; OECD, 2014[74]; Darling-Hammond and Rothman, 2011[75]). School-embedded approaches can help teachers relate the content of training to their school and classroom context, while also supporting the development of a culture of improvement and a shared vision for learning (OECD, 2019[76]). In Albania, however, professional development primarily occurs outside of schools in seminar format through the professional learning networks. The Quality Assurance Agency should encourage school-based subject teams to play a more active role in professional collaborative learning, which can be used to develop assessment literacy by, for example, engaging in moderation exercises. The professional learning networks should also be harnessed to support the work of subject teams, for example by providing opportunities for teachers to share how they have worked with their subject teams to engage in practices discussed in the professional learning network (see Chapter 3). The Quality Assurance Agency should clearly define the topics, such as formative assessment or reliability in grading, where both subject teams and professional learning networks should focus and engage in active learning activities. Schools might be encouraged to select a teacher who can be trained by the Quality Assurance Agency to be an assessment coordinator in each subject team or, in the case of small schools, across subject teams. The assessment coordinator would organise:

- **Assessment moderation**: Teachers in the same subject team can mark each other's assessments and discuss differences in their marking. Assessment coordinators can also facilitate between-school moderation within the professional learning networks, which would help align the work of these two groups. Research suggests moderation can help teachers build a shared understanding of criteria for marking and expectations for learning, and it is a key strategy for improving the reliability of teacher judgements and marking within and across schools (OECD, 2013[2]). This would also help teachers to identify learning issues early on. Moderation could be conducted at first with end-of-term assessments and then extended to other

assessment forms when overall assessment literacy has improved. Assessment coordinators should draw on national data such as VANAF results to provide an external perspective and strengthen reliability of marking.

- **Assessment practice discussions**: Teachers in Albania should use school-based teams to discuss how to best implement some of the learning from outside training, in particular from the professional learning networks, in their schools and classrooms. As further discussed in Chapter 3, school-based teams should provide opportunities for teachers to engage in peer-learning activities such as peer classroom observations, coaching, looking at student work and how to mark it, co-creation of instructional material, and targeted reflective discussions around improving teacher practice (Harrison, 2005[77]; Tang et al., 2010[78]; Darling-Hammond and Rothman, 2011[75]). In Georgia, for example, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Georgia Primary Education Project (2011-2017) focused on fostering school-based professional development by training teachers within schools to lead peer learning and implement activities such as teacher learning circles to discuss student achievement and ways to improve instructional effectiveness (Li et al., 2019[37]).

Expand online supports for teachers

The Quality Assurance Agency should develop significantly the pre-tertiary curriculum platform to become a hub for teacher training, resources and guidance (see Chapter 3). The platform would be the home for the resources this review recommends, which include formative assessment toolkits and marked exemplars of student work. In Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has created a website with a wide variety of practitioner tools and resources, including lesson plans, guidance on providing feedback and video examples of how to use different methods to assess students (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017[79]). The Quality Assurance Agency should also progressively open the platform so that teachers can upload their own assessments and resources. The Quality Assurance Agency will need to carefully screen uploads in the short run in order to ensure quality. In the long run, materials could be peer reviewed by expert teachers (e.g. Level 4 or 5 on the proposed teacher career structure; see Chapter 3).

Policy issue 2.2. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the exam system

Albania is seeking to align its examinations with the new curriculum, which is entering its final year of implementation in 2019. This represents an opportunity for revising not only the content but also the design and administration process of the National Basic Education Examination and the State Matura Examination. While both exams are relatively fit for purpose and compare positively in terms of design to exams in other Western Balkan countries, they would benefit from continuous improvement to increase their reliability in assessing students' learning. Reliability is important for providing comparable information on individual student achievement of learning expectations. In the case of the National Basic Education Examination, testing conditions and the quality of marking vary across the local education offices that administer and mark the test. This is due in part to a lack of adequate training and incentives for teachers responsible for administering and marking the exam.

The design of the exams could also be improved to better assess students' application of knowledge and skills, as well as to assess a wider range of competencies. For example, because the vast majority of students pass the National Basic Education Exam and the

results are not typically used to place students into general upper secondary programmes, Albania could afford to be more innovative with the exam design to enhance the positive backwash on classroom practice. This might include the introduction of a project element and also a portfolio defence. Over time, some of these innovations could be adapted to the State Matura Examination.

Recommendation 2.2.1. Reinforce the reliability of the National Basic Education Examination and review its design

The ministry and the ESC should improve the National Basic Education Examination to ensure that it reliably measures students' level of proficiency and assesses a wider range of the competencies found in the curriculum. This will require a revision of both the exam administration and the test design. Albania faces several challenges in the administration conducted by local education offices (previously by RED/EOs), including security breaches, test-taking conditions that are not adequately controlled and difficulties recruiting qualified teachers to serve as test administrators or markers. This can be improved in the short term through stronger oversight by the ESC and more support for evaluators, and in the longer term through computer-based administration and marking. The test design can also be improved by adjusting the number and quality of test items to increase reliability and to better assess curriculum competencies. Finally, Albania should consider involving teachers in test-item development and introducing a project-based component in order to promote teachers' use of these approaches in their classrooms.

Give the ESC a mandate for quality control

Currently, the ESC does not play a quality control role for the National Basic Education Examination. The agency produces a report for the ministry analysing the results and any notable discrepancy, but this report is not used to hold the local education offices accountable for the quality of the administration of the exam. To ensure better comparability at the national level and to improve the reliability of the exam, Albania should consider giving the ESC a mandate for quality control, which could include:

- **Sending observers to testing centres** to monitor the administration of the exam against the exam administration manual. In addition to increasing the reliability of results by ensuring testing conditions are the same across local education offices, sending observers to testing centres would also help build trust in the results of the National Basic Education Examination (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017[80]).
- **Auditing a random sample of tests in each local education office** to ensure the quality of marking meets standards set forth in marking schemes and to identify local education offices where further training and support is needed.

As Albania builds the capacity and systems needed to expand the use of on-screen marking and implement computer-based assessments in the medium term (see Recommendation 2.2.2), the ministry may choose to move to a system of centralised administration and marking of the National Basic Education Examination, as is currently the case for the State Matura Examination. The ministry will need to provide additional resources to the ESC for it to carry out any new expanded mandate.

Provide incentives and improved training to teachers to strengthen the reliability of marking and administration

In addition to more oversight, steps are also needed to attract and train more qualified examiners. Prior to 2019, there were no incentives to apply to this role. Though the practice

of not remunerating teachers was due to change in 2019, the ministry will need to ensure remuneration is high enough to attract quality candidates. To further incentivise teachers, this role should be recognised in the career structure. For example, the role of evaluator could be incorporated into "Level 4" in the career structure proposed in this review (see Chapter 3). The competencies needed for this role - in assessment marking, for example - could be incorporated into the differentiated teaching standards.

Training for administrators and evaluators also needs to be improved. Individual local education offices design and deliver their own training, causing the quality of this training to be variable. While the ESC trains representatives from local education offices, this training has been inadequate for ensuring reliability of results. It is important that administrators and evaluators follow strict procedures set forth in ministry regulations in order to ensure reliability. The ESC should be responsible for ensuring that administrators and evaluators of the National Basic Education Examination receive adequate training that is designed at the national level. This could be accomplished through a train-the-trainer model, whereby those in local education offices who train administrators and evaluators must attend training delivered by the ESC. Additionally, as is done with the State Matura, evaluators should also be required to pass a test developed by the ESC to certify their role.

Revise test items to improve reliability and alignment with the curriculum

As Albania reviews the design of the National Basic Education Examination, it should consider the following to improve the properties of the exam:

- **Increase the number of test items.** The ESC should consider increasing the number of items within each test to improve its general psychometric properties and, at the same time, to assess a broader set of competencies. Based on the test samples reviewed by the OECD, the number of items of medium difficulty seem limited. This limits the capacity of the tests to discriminate across the ability range. Albania could increase the number of medium difficulty items within the existing framework because each test lasts for 150-minutes with a maximum possible score of 50 points. This allows 3 minutes per marking point, which is more generous than the average time typically found at this level in other exam systems. For example, in Singapore's Primary School Leaving Examination, the first part of the test, which includes multiple-choice and short-response questions, allows for 1.3 minutes per marking point (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, 2019[81]). Part two, which includes short-answer and long-answer questions, allows for 1.6 minutes per marking point.
- **Remove restrictions on multiple-choice items**. The mathematics test could be made more reliable by including 20-25 multiple-choice items rather than the 13 multiple-choice items currently required, especially if these items were targeted to the middle of the ability range. In the Albanian language test, removing the 13 multiple-choice item restriction would give test setters more freedom in the design of the test, particularly when such items are text-based. For example, test setters would have greater flexibility to choose from a wider range of texts and vary their length and the number of constructed items. This would allow them to generate better test items, particularly those that test skills in context.
- **Revise the quality of test items**. Most free-response items are not functioning as multi-point items but rather dichotomously, meaning students are scoring all or none of the points, especially in mathematics. While this ensures discrimination at the extremes of the ability range it weakens discrimination in the middle of the

range where most students are found. The functioning of such items should be checked through statistical analysis and, where necessary, their scoring should be revised. Complementary items may then be introduced to ensure better syllabus coverage and enhanced discrimination across the ability range.

- **Include more application of knowledge and skills**. A national examination aligned to a competency-based curriculum often includes more application and problem solving in real-world contexts (see Recommendation 2.2.2), as is described, for example, in the 2018-2019 Albanian National Basic Education Examination Programme for mathematics. While this review was unable to analyse test samples from the 2019 examination, one would expect to see significant shifts in test items as compared to those prior to the curriculum-aligned examination in 2019. For example, in Albanian language, students would engage with more real-world rather than "literary" sources of text. Tasks in mathematics would prompt students to use authentic data and practical contexts in addition to traditional abstract and "formal" mathematics.

As the ESC engages in an ongoing review of the National Basic Education Examination design, it should also expand the pool of teachers who participate in the development of test items to build system capacity, as is recommended in this review for the State Matura Examination (see Recommendation 2.2.2).

Assess a broader set of competencies

In addition to achievement in traditional subject areas, Albania's curriculum framework sets the expectation that students will master the seven key competencies for lifelong learning (AQAPUE, 2014[14]). However, these competencies are not systematically assessed, which means students and parents, as well as teachers, administrators and policy makers, have little information on student learning and progress in these areas. Assessing these competencies through a formal examination can also have positive backwash effects, helping teachers and students take competencies more seriously and helping to shift the focus of teaching and learning in classrooms. In addition, the type of quality investment needed to develop grading criteria for a formal examination would yield benefits for classroom assessment, including portfolio assessment.

In order to evaluate students' achievement of a wider range of competencies, a school-based, cross-disciplinary project could be introduced as a component of the National Basic Education Examination. Such a component would build on the "curriculum project" that is already required as part of classroom assessment, and it could assess transversal skills found within the key competencies such as communication, use of digital media and ICT, collaboration, problem solving and project management. In Ireland, for example, the reform to the Junior Leaving Certificate, which accompanied the curriculum reform, was deliberately revised to include more project-based work and to help shift the focus of assessment toward supporting teaching and learning throughout the whole lower secondary education cycle (MacPhail, Halbert and O'Neill, 2018[82]) (see Box 2.5).

Box 2.5. Lower secondary examination in Ireland

In 2015, Ireland introduced a new framework for the Junior Cycle of education (lower secondary level, three years in total). An assessment model called the Junior Cycle Profiles of Achievement (JCPA) is included in the framework. The reform takes a dual approach to assessment, increasing the focus on classroom-based assessment and formative assessment alongside the final external examination.

Under the JCPA model, students must take two Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs), one in their second year and one in their third year, in each subject. These assessments might include oral presentations, written work, practical activities, artistic performances and scientific experiments. Teachers are provided with assessment criteria, called Features of Quality, and other guidelines and materials for engaging in CBAs. In addition, teachers participate in Subject Learning Assessment Review meetings organised by subject to discuss students' work related to the CBAs. The purpose of these meetings is to help teachers be more consistent in their judgements, provide better feedback to students, and align more closely their judgements to assessment standards, including the Features of Quality.

Related to the second CBA is the written Assessment Task, which requires that students demonstrate an understanding of the knowledge and skills covered in the second CBA. This task is specified and published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Students complete the task in class under the supervision of teachers and in accordance with guidelines provided by the NCCA. The task is marked centrally by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

At the end of their third year, students take external examinations in most subjects. All exams are created, administered and marked centrally by the SEC. Most subjects have only one common level of difficulty, though English, Mathematics and Irish have two levels (ordinary and higher).

As education in Ireland is compulsory up to age 16, or three years of secondary education, students who receive their junior cycle certification must choose whether to continue with schooling or pursue other training opportunities. Their assessment results in junior cycle – classroom-based and external – act as key pieces of information that help them make this important decision.

Sources: Ireland Department of Education and Skills (2015[83]), *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*, www.education.ie (accessed on 18 December 2019); Eurydice (2018[84]), *Assessment in Lower Secondary Education – Ireland*, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/assessment-lower-secondary-education_en (accessed on 18 December 2019); NCAA (n.d.[85]), *Junior Cycle*, https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/ (accessed on 19 December 2019).

Albania will need to clearly define the structure and provide detailed assessment criteria to standardise the marking of the school-based project component. This will help ensure a high enough level of reliability and trust in the examination, which is important given its role in the certification of student completion of basic education. The Quality Assurance Agency, in co-ordination with the ESC, will need to:

- **Develop criteria for the design and marking**. This would include the time allocated to teachers and students for developing the project, the target competencies or learning outcomes and their weightings, the final product of the project, how the product will be assessed (e.g. by panel) and the marking scheme for the product. In Ireland, teachers are provided with assessment guidelines and assessment criteria for engaging in Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in lower secondary education (see Box 2.5).

- **Train teachers to supervise the project-based assessment and to mark it**. This training could be included in mandatory training on assessment as described in this review. It could also be included as a focus in both professional learning networks and in school-based subject teams.
- **Introduce moderation, including a role for an external evaluator**. An external evaluator would serve on a panel that marks the project-based assessment or mark the project-based assessment themselves. This external evaluator could be a teacher from another school who has been certified as an evaluator for the State Matura or, once the ESC begins certifying them, as an evaluator for the National Basic Education Examination. The ESC will need to monitor closely the results of this school-based assessment.

Recommendation 2.2.2. Review the design, administration and scoring of the State Matura to improve the exam's quality

In 2019, the State Matura Examination was re-designed in an effort to bring it more into line with the 2014 curriculum framework. However, test items in the new State Matura do not yet reflect the authentic contexts relevant to learners that are demanded by the competency-based curriculum, particularly in mathematics where traditional approaches to formal mathematics continue to dominate instead of more applied approaches. This section suggests how item design and development might be improved and teacher skills in item-writing strengthened. It also argues the value of Albania moving in the future to computer-based assessments, building on the recent introduction of digital marking. This has the potential to bring gains not only in terms of test quality, but also security, efficiency, reliability, and over time, cost-effectiveness.

Improve training and broaden the pool of potential test writers

While the ESC's item writers have attempted to respond to the new specifications of the State Matura Examination, the ESC needs to provide more training and orientation in developing items that reflect the competencies required by the new exam programme. For example, sample test items for the 2019 State Matura test in mathematics use few contexts that are practical and relevant to young people. The ESC training for item writers and test developers should include how to test the application of knowledge and skills and how to develop items set in authentic, real-world contexts. In the UK GCSE mathematics exams, item writers address this issue by developing questions in contexts which are familiar to virtually all students (e.g. ordering meal combinations at a fast-food restaurant or calculating the number of text messages sent between friends) (OCR, 2018[86]; Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, 2017[87]).

As Albania reviews the training provided to test item writers and test developers, it should consider how it could use the item development process to build capacity across the teacher workforce. At present, the ESC develops items for the State Matura with small subject groups that include teachers. In 2019, five teachers participated in each subject team, and the majority of these teachers had previously served as test item writers for the State Matura. Over time, the ESC should look more deliberately at how it can extend the pool of teachers who contribute to item-writing. For example, the ESC might consider offering specific training on item-writing for interested teachers in lower and upper secondary who demonstrate subject-area expertise (Kuan, 2011[88]). Universities can also be encouraged to offer specialised post-graduate courses in item-writing and test development. After being trained, these teachers might be invited to develop test items,

possibly through an online portal, and to submit them for review and comments to more experienced item writers or a group of experts (Waddington, Nentwig and Schanze, 2008[89]). Items that meet quality standards could be included in the item pool. Teachers might then be tasked with sharing what they learnt with other teachers through the professional learning networks or school-based subject teams. Teachers will also need to be incentivised to apply to participate in item-writing. Item writers should be remunerated, and training and university courses should contribute to advancing to Level 4 or Level 5 on the new career structure or to taking on a role such as assessment coordinator (see Chapter 3).

Eliminate the pre-determined cut-score and move to a norm-referenced or criteria-related approach to standard-setting

Currently, the pass/fail cut-score for State Matura Examination tests and National Basic Education Examination tests is set at a fixed level of 20% of the maximum possible score. This is clear and easy for all stakeholders to understand, but it neither takes into account possible variations in the difficulty of tests from one year to the next nor links results to expected levels of achievement found in the curriculum. A fixed cut-score can also produce comparisons of results over time that are misleading: an increase in the pass rate may in fact be due to the use of an easier test rather than an increase in the absolute level of achievement.

In the medium term, as part of the ongoing review of both national examinations, Albania should move to either a norm-referenced or criteria-related approach to standard-setting on both exams. The following are considerations to take into account, alongside building political and public support for the chosen course:

- **In the norm-referencing approach** used in OECD countries such as Finland, students are classified based on a comparison among them, which means their scores have meaning only relative to the scores of other students (OECD, 2013[2]). The proportions of the testing cohort falling into each reporting category are set in advance, which means the level of difficulty of the test does not lead to advantage or disadvantage for individual students. The drawback is that the relative outcomes are always the same (i.e. same proportions in each reporting category) and absolute improvements or declines in student learning outcomes will not affect these results. This means that the exam would not be able to be used to monitor trends in student learning. If Albania chooses norm-referencing, the trends in exam results should not be included in the school report card (see Chapter 4).
- **In criteria-related systems**, found in many OECD countries such as Slovenia, Lithuania and Latvia, the test items and student responses are analysed against expected levels of achievement. This approach to standard-setting is used to make judgements about absolute levels of performance in relation to established standards or criteria (OECD, 2013[2]). Using a mixture of subjective judgement and statistical evidence, grade thresholds are reviewed and adjusted annually in order to compensate for test difficulty and, hence, maintain absolute standards. The drawback is that this process is less transparent and more complicated to explain to the general public. Moving to a criteria-related system would be a big shift in culture for Albania, and, though such a shift aligns with the intended shift in classroom assessment practice, it may not be readily accepted in a system where this is not the tradition.

Prepare for the expanded implementation of digital marking in the short term and computer-based assessment in the medium term

In 2019, Albania shifted from a paper-based to digital system of marking, oftentimes referred to as on-screen marking (OSM) or e-marking, for the multiple-choice sections of the State Matura Examination. OSM offers several benefits over pen-and-paper marking, particularly since, using OSM, tests do not have to physically move once they have been scanned and saved. This improves efficiency and security, as the single copy of a paper-based test will typically change hands and spaces more often than a secure digital copy (Coniam, 2009[90]). In terms of the reliability of marking, research suggests that paper-based and on-screen marking offer comparable levels of reliability (Johnson, Nádas and Bell, 2009[91]; Johnson, Hopkin and Shiell, 2012[92]; Coniam, 2009[90]).

Albania's shift toward OSM will also serve as a stepping stone toward computer-based assessment, or the presentation of traditional tests and innovative item-types on-screen. This would bring several benefits, including: immediate marking; a complete database of item-level and student-level data; increased reliability of scoring for multiple-choice questions; greater security; and, potentially, lower costs.

As Albania reviews its transition to OSM and looks toward implementation of computer-based assessments, it should consider the following:

- **Develop a comprehensive plan for expanding OSM implementation and moving toward computer-based assessments**. The plan should include the rationale for moving towards OSM and computer-based assessments and the desired purposes and characteristics of future applications within Albania's system of assessment (e.g. application to the National Basic Education Examination and the VANAF (see Chapter 5) and to open-ended items on the State Matura). The plan should also describe the technical specifications to be developed, in particular how students will encounter computer-based tests and how student responses will be processed. For example, students could enter written responses on paper-based tests, which would be digitised for processing, or they could enter responses directly on-screen. Another consideration would be how tests are marked, automatically or by humans on-screen, and where they are marked, in regional centres or "at home". Albania should draw on lessons learnt from the 2019 implementation of OSM for multiple-choice questions on the State Matura to inform decisions made in developing the plan and its underlying rationale. This is important as the plan will determine the infrastructure and software, as well as associated costs, required to refine and expand OSM and deliver computer-based assessments.
- **Invest in the modernisation of IT systems and infrastructure.** The ministry will need to invest in the physical and logistical infrastructure needed to expand OSM. This includes providing a secure network and fit-for-purpose computing devices and meeting the needs of transforming a physical test into a secure digital file that can be marked on-screen. In Hong Kong (China), for example, tests are delivered to a scanning centre and scanned into digital files (see Box 2.6). If Albania chooses to conduct OSM in regional marking centres, additional investment would be needed to update the IT infrastructure. In Hong Kong (China), a multi-million dollar grant for IT modernisation was allocated to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in 2005, almost two years prior to the implementation

of OSM in Year 11 examinations in early 2011 (Coniam, 2013[93]; Coniam, 2009[90]).

- **Ensure that item-types are adapted for digital marking.** Albania should review how items are marked using OSM, namely whether multiple-choice items are scored automatically or manually and whether markers score all open-ended items in a single test or score only certain items "cut" from full tests (see Box 2.6). When planning for expansion to the National Basic Education Examination and the VANAF, Albania will need to take important decisions on how multiple-choice and open-ended items are marked.
- **Ensure that the hardware and software allows tests to be easily navigated, manipulated and annotated**. This is important as research suggests that digital annotation of text responses should be similar to ink-and-paper annotation, as annotation is linked to how markers engage with the text (e.g. active reading, deeper reflection) and is important for ensuring on-screen annotation does not lead to less accurate marks (Shaw, 2008[94]).
- **Train teachers in marking on-screen and marking specific to the hardware and software used**. Learning from the software application for OSM that was used in the State Matura in 2019, the ESC should further develop and deliver training for markers. Training could be mandated to be included in the obligatory training to certify markers provided by the ESC. In Hong Kong (China), for example, teachers who will be marking must engage in training and demonstrate a certain standard of marking before marking actual tests on-screen (Coniam, 2013[93]).

Box 2.6. On-screen marking in Hong Kong, China

In Hong Kong (China), on-screen marking (OSM) was first put into place by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) in 2007 for the marking of English and Chinese language papers of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). With this technology, the HKEAA intended to improve the quality, efficiency, reliability and security of its marking scheme. All scripts of the HKDSE administered by the HKEAA have been marked using OSM since 2012, and since 2015 this has included the written papers of all subjects of the HKDSE. After examinations are completed by candidates and collected by the HKEAA, answer scripts are scanned, saved and kept in a secure database for recordkeeping. Candidates' scripts, which may include both multiple-choice and long answer questions, are then randomly distributed to markers using a secure intranet system accessed only by users. Scripts are manually marked at assessment centres which provide around 1 500 workstations for OSM. This means markers do not need to collect scripts or return them to the HKEAA, which improves the level of security. Most markers hired by the HKEAA to carry out on-screen marking are qualified full-time teachers.

How the scripts are divided and distributed for marking is related to the subject area. For example, markers of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects generally mark scripts by section (a set of questions with standardised responses), as most of them require closed-ended responses. By contrast, markers of social science subjects are usually given specific questions to mark instead of a whole section. This is because scripts for social subjects are composed of extended responses (e.g. essay questions), structured responses and standardised responses (e.g. multiple-choice questions).

In addition to improving the security of the grading scheme by eliminating the movement of scripts, on-screen marking has also improved the quality of marking. For example, OSM incorporates features such as the random distribution of special scripts with pre-assigned scores to verify if markers are adhering to the pre-established marking standards. This helps improve marking consistency. OSM has also increased the grading system's efficiency. For example, scripts are immediately distributed to two markers at the same time for double marking. The calculation of marks is also improved, as marks are automatically assembled and checked by the computer system.

Sources: HKEAA (2018[95]), *Onscreen Marking,* Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/exam_personnel/osm/ (accessed on 19 September 2019); HKEAA (2015[96]), *Onscreen Marking System,* Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/Media/Leaflets/leaflet_OSM_Dec2015_eng.pdf (accessed on 19 September 2019); Yang, Yan and Conima (2017[97]), *A Qualitative Study of Markers' Perceptions on Onscreen Marking in Five Subject Areas*, Educational Research and Evaluation, https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1446836.

Develop more complex test items using computer-based assessment

As described in this review, Albania's national assessment system could be improved to assess a wider range of competencies, particularly Albania's key competencies for lifelong learning, which are currently not assessed by any national assessment or examination. As Albania looks toward the adoption of computer-based assessment, it should make use of this technology to develop more complex test items, as computer-based assessment allows for item-types that can be used to measure higher-order thinking and transversal skills such as problem solving (Tilchin and Raiyn, 2015[98]).

For example, in the United States, Smarter Balanced assessments, which are aligned to Common Core State Standards and include questions to measure 21st century competencies, allow students to select and move items on-screen to construct their response, which allows for responses that are more complex (Soland, Hamilton and Stecher, 2013[99]). Computer-based international assessments such as PISA are interactive and feature a combination of text, images and items that students can manipulate, such as clickable roadmaps that automatically calculate travel time, in order to solve real-world problems (OECD, 2018[100]).These advanced features offer assessors opportunities to measure how students are applying skills and knowledge and to assess levels of achievement with respect to competencies.

Table of recommendations

Policy issue	Recommendations	Actions
2.1. Supporting teachers to make better use of assessment to improve student learning	2.1.1. Revise and further clarify national assessment policies	Define expected learning outcomes by grade level
		Provide teachers with examples of student work
		Provide teachers with disaggregated VANAF results to inform teaching and learning
		Create a national policy on formative assessment
		Reduce the frequency of marking
		Better align teacher appraisal and school evaluation with the expectations of the assessment framework
	2.1.2. Provide teachers with guidelines and tools to help them improve their assessment practices	Provide further guidelines and tools for teachers on portfolio assessment
		Develop diagnostic assessment tools for teachers
		Help teachers provide better feedback to students on their progress
	2.1.3. Ensure that teachers have access to quality training on assessment and incentives to participate in such training	Provide clear guidance for preparation on assessment in initial teacher education
		Provide mandatory and free training on key elements of the assessment framework
		Encourage in-school teacher collaborative learning on assessment
		Expand online supports for teachers
2.2. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the exam system	2.2.1. Reinforce the reliability of the National Basic Education Examination and review its design	Give the ESC a mandate for quality control
		Provide incentives and improved training to teachers to strengthen the reliability of marking and administration
		Revise test items to improve reliability and alignment with the curriculum
		Assess a broader set of competencies
	2.2.2. Review the design, administration and scoring of the State Matura to improve the exam's quality	Improve training and broaden the pool of potential test writers
		Eliminate the pre-determined cut-score and move to a norm-referenced or criteria-related approach to standard-setting
		Prepare for expanded implementation of digital marking in the short term and computer-based assessment in the medium term
		Develop more complex test items using computer-based assessment

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Chapter 3. Supporting teachers' professional growth

This chapter explores how Albania's appraisal processes and related teaching standards, career structure and professional learning policies could better develop teachers' competencies. While Albania has a range of appraisal processes, they are not designed to support teachers' professional growth. In addition, teachers' professional development remains underfunded, which contributes to a lack of effective job-embedded learning opportunities. Albania needs to revise its appraisal processes and teacher career structure and further invest in professional learning to help its existing teacher workforce develop more complex knowledge and skills. Albania also needs to address factors that may dissuade the best candidates from entering the teaching profession, including onerous procedures for certification. Finally, Albania needs to ensure that initial teacher education programmes are equipping future entrants with the student-centred approaches and other competencies they will need for the classroom.

Introduction

Albania would benefit from making better use of appraisal processes and related teaching standards to ensure that future teachers and those already working in schools develop new competencies. This will support the country's education reform. As a priority, Albania should revise the teacher career structure and the appraisal for promotion process. A new career structure should reward teachers for demonstrating more advanced competencies and assuming additional responsibilities. This will support the development of Albania's existing teacher workforce, many of whom are mid-career or younger. Albania should also revise the regular appraisal process, which is largely administrative, to support teachers' development. The country should ensure that this process leads to the provision of constructive feedback and participation in professional learning opportunities.

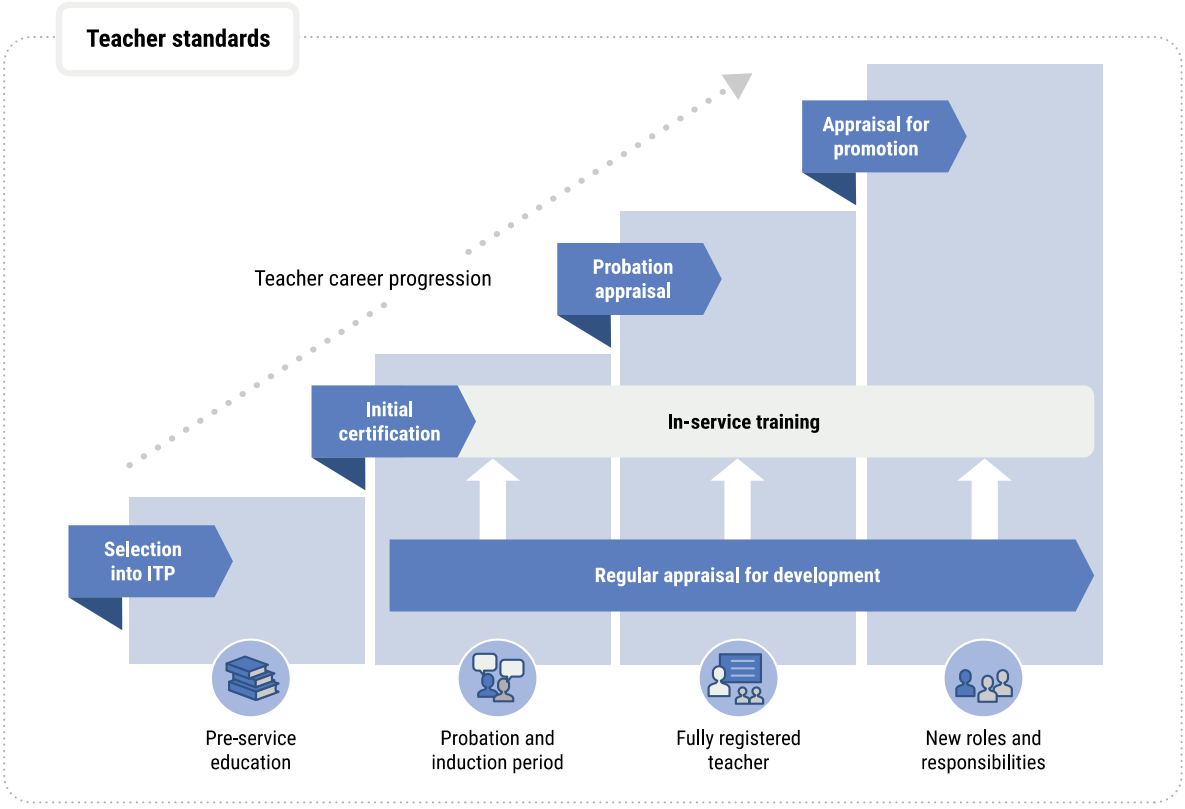
To complement these new processes, Albania should invest more in teachers' continuous professional development. In a positive move, Albania has established forums for teachers' collaborative learning, including local networks and school subject teams. Albania now needs to better support these groups to provide meaningful learning opportunities to teachers.

To ensure that new entrants to the profession are also equipped with the competencies they need to be effective, Albania should expand efforts to improve initial teacher preparation and selection. Albania should also fill the gap in support for teachers employed in their first teaching position, especially teachers working in the country's remote and rural schools.

Key features of an effective teacher appraisal system

Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance and competencies. An effective appraisal system focuses on how well teachers are supporting the learning of all students. It provides teachers with support and incentives to continually develop their teaching competencies and assume roles that contribute to the development of the teaching profession overall. When used in this way, appraisal can positively influence teachers' attitudes, motivation and classroom practices and, through this, help to improve students' learning outcomes (OECD, 2013[1]). Countries combine different types of appraisal at different moments of a teacher's career to inform ongoing learning, professional development and career progression (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Types of teacher appraisal



Note: ITP: Initial Training Programme

Teacher standards

Standards provide a common reference point for teacher policies, including appraisal

A growing number of OECD countries have developed teacher standards to inform teacher policy and practices. Teacher standards describe what "good" teaching is and how it is demonstrated. They are used to align key teacher policies such as initial teacher education, certification and recertification, career progression, professional development and teacher appraisal. Teacher standards are an essential part of an effective teacher appraisal system as they provide a common reference point for both teachers and evaluators that establish clear expectations, encourage consistent judgement and focus appraisal on the key aspects of teaching that matter for learning (Santiago et al., 2013[2]).

Teacher standards typically include a general profile setting out expected teacher competencies. Some also include specialised profiles for particular types of teachers such as for more experienced teachers as part of a differentiated career path, or for teachers of different educational levels or subjects (Santiago et al., 2013[2]). Effective teacher standards are aligned with national education priorities, learning standards and curricula to ensure that teachers develop teaching competencies that will support national learning goals (Louden, 2000[3]).They are developed through broad consultation and grounded in national and international evidence of the teaching approaches shown to have the greatest impact on student learning.

Initial teacher preparation

Select candidates with strong academic skills and motivation to teach

Selecting teacher candidates with strong academic skills and the motivation to teach is key to ensure quality learning and teaching in schools. This influences how teachers are recruited both into initial teacher education programmes and into the teaching profession. A recognised feature of the world's highest performing education systems is setting a high bar for entry into initial teacher education, with places accorded only to the most able school graduates (Barber and Mourshed, 2007[4]). One way to support this is by setting a minimum threshold on the national school graduation or tertiary entry examinations.

Set a rigorous certification process at the end of teacher education to ensure the selection of qualified new teachers

Initial certification at the end of teacher education serves as a gatekeeper to ensure that those who enter the profession have acquired the basic competencies required for good teaching. In most OECD countries, initial certification requires successful completion of teacher education programmes which provide at least a bachelor's level qualification and increasingly a qualification at master's level. However, many OECD countries require in addition that prospective teachers pass an external qualification or licensing examination, which can help to ensure fairness and consistency for selection and guarantee basic standards (OECD, 2014[5]). This is particularly important in countries were teaching is a "career-based" public service and lifetime employment is largely guaranteed, and where quality assurance in the tertiary sector is weak. Since an examination cannot recognise all the attributes that are important for teaching, countries with examinations often complement them with other forms of assessment such as interviews, which can capture motivation and socio-emotional skills. Finally, in most countries, full certification as a teacher depends on successfully passing a probation appraisal, where teachers can better demonstrate the attitudinal dimensions of good teaching.

Types of teacher appraisal

A probation period and appraisal provide new teachers with essential support in their first year(s) on the job

The first years of teaching are critical to build the foundations of good teaching practices. Most OECD countries set probation periods combining mentorship, classroom observations and formative feedback to ensure that new teachers are provided with support to develop their teaching practice (OECD, 2014[5]). Regular appraisal and feedback to teachers are key components of the probation period. In countries where the latter are not part of the probation period, retention rates of new teachers are often lower (OECD, 2017[6]).

In about half of OECD countries, successfully passing an appraisal at the end of the probation period is a requirement to become a fully certified teacher (see Figure 3.2). Probation appraisals help to ensure that decisions on full certification are based on an evaluation of all the key competencies for teaching. Appraisal by the school leadership team, the school board or the teacher's mentor is the most common approach to full certification. These in-school actors can observe a trainee teacher's practice throughout the year, providing a fuller picture of their readiness to enter the profession. In some countries, the probation appraisal also includes an external evaluator (OECD, 2013[1]).An external

dimension for the probation appraisal is particularly important in education systems where the school leadership might lack capacity to make a valid and objective judgement about a teacher's competencies.

Regularly appraising teachers provides meaningful feedback and informs classroom practices

Regularly appraising teachers to provide feedback on their professional practices is a common component of teacher appraisal in the majority of OECD countries (see Figure 3.2). Regular appraisal is primarily developmental, identifying a teacher's strengths and their learning needs. It draws on information from classroom observations to provide specific feedback to support teachers' continued professional growth (OECD, 2013[1]). Some OECD countries also use teachers' self-evaluation and their teaching portfolio as part of regular appraisal, as they encourage self-reflection and provide a range of evidence on a teacher's practices and needs for professional development (OECD, 2015[7]).

In most OECD countries, the regular appraisal of teachers is led by the school leadership team because they can develop a more accurate understanding of a teacher's practice, based on multiple observations throughout the year. Since the leadership team is familiar to the teacher, this is also likely to create a more informal setting for appraisal to encourage open and honest feedback (OECD, 2013[1]).

The formative value of regular appraisal is strengthened when the findings are used to inform decisions on teachers' professional development. In many countries, the school leader or leadership team is expected to work with teachers to establish individualised development plans, which define the type of activities a teacher will undertake to improve specific areas of practice. Such plans are most effective when they connect individual goals with school priorities for teacher development, as this helps to encourage teacher collaboration and peer-learning (Goe, Biggers and Croft, 2012[8]).

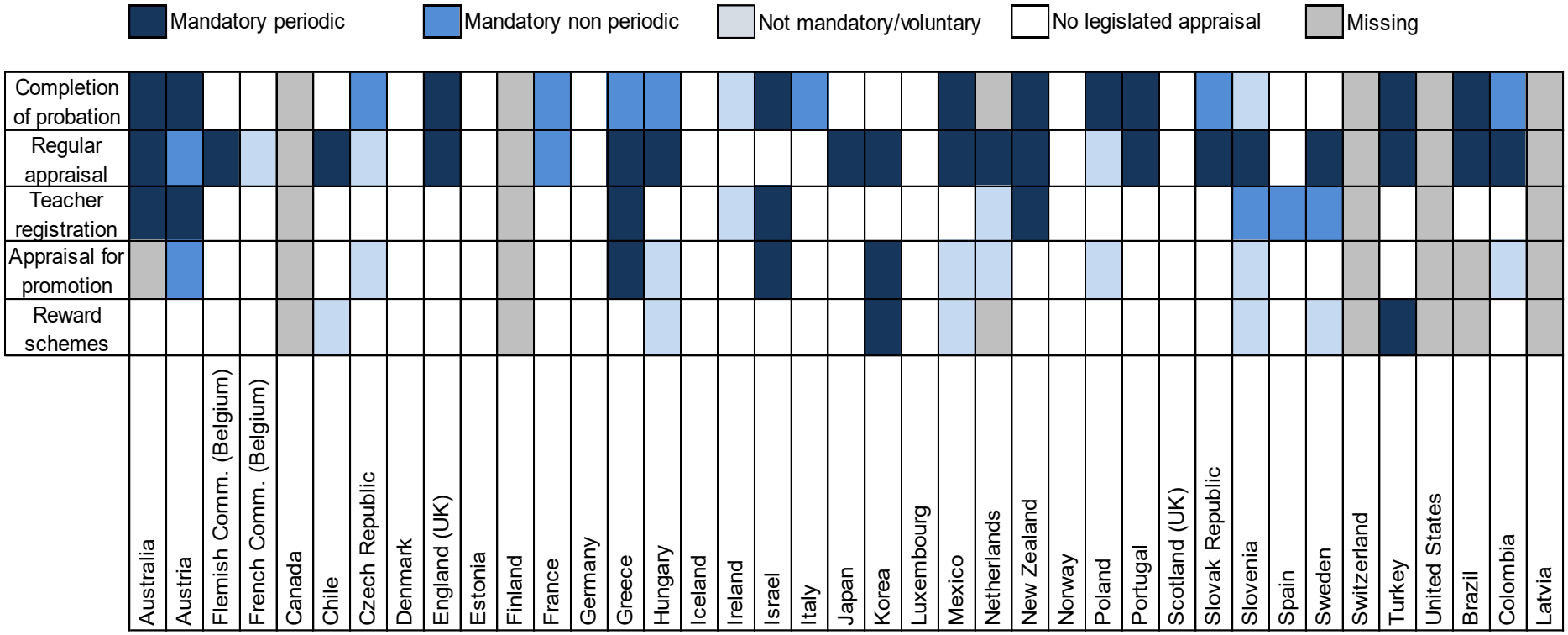
Appraisal for promotion informs teachers' career progression and rewards performance

An increasing number of OECD countries are setting merit-based career structures to reward and encourage teachers to develop higher levels of competency and take on differentiated teaching roles. External appraisal is often used in countries that introduced a merit-based career structure to inform teacher career advancement. This appraisal is often voluntary, at the request of a teacher, and is led by an evaluator external to the school to ensure integrity and transparency. This type of appraisal evaluates teachers' capacity to take on further responsibilities and rewards effective teaching (OECD, 2013[1]). Recognising and rewarding good teaching is important to ensure a motivated teaching profession. It is also helps to make the best use of teachers' talent, by providing opportunities for career growth and retaining talented teachers (OECD, 2014[9]).

Some education systems require teachers to go through an appraisal process to be re-certified as a teacher every couple of years. This recertification process helps make sure that teachers are periodically appraised by an external appraising body even if they are not applying for promotion (Kitchen et al., 2017[10]).

Figure 3.2. Types of teacher appraisals in OECD countries, 2015

General programmes, lower secondary education



Source: OECD (2015[7]), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators,* http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.

The teaching profession in Albania

Efforts to improve the quality of teaching in Albania have mostly focused on initial teacher education. To raise the calibre of entrants to the profession, Albania has introduced more selective entry requirements for initial teacher education programmes and is working to improve the quality of those programmes. However, once teachers enter the profession, incentives to continuously develop competencies and improve performance are limited. The career structure does not reward higher levels of performance and salary progression is relatively flat. While teachers do engage in professional learning, they receive little to no guidance about training that would address their needs.

The teaching workforce in Albania

Many teachers are young or at the mid-career point

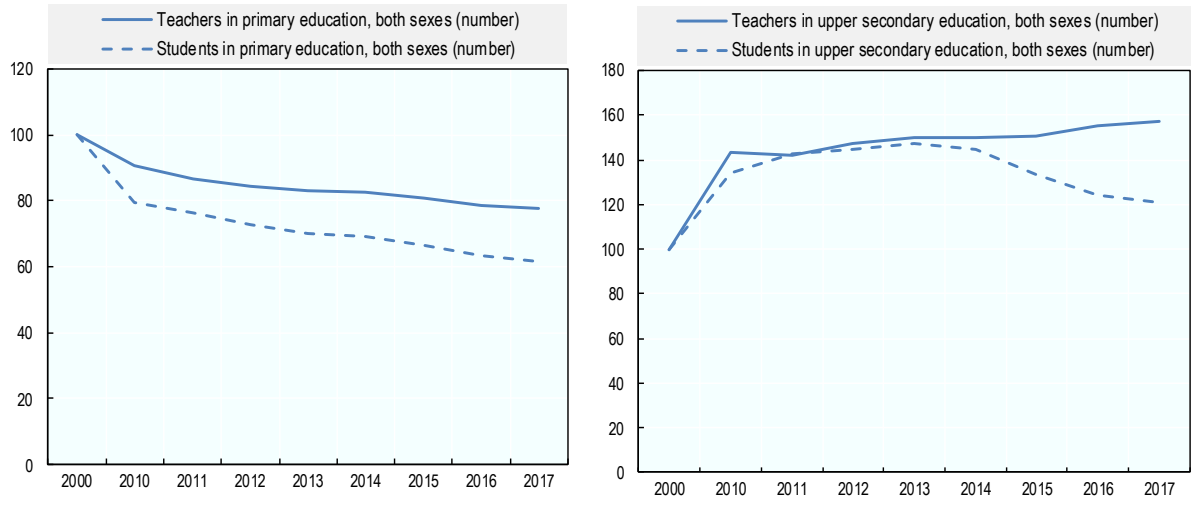
Albania has seen a significant decline in its school age population, while the number of teachers has decreased only slightly and, at the upper secondary level, increased (see Figure 3.3). This has led to a decrease in the student-teacher ratio at the secondary level. Between 2012 and 2018, the ratio decreased from 13:1 to 10:1 at the lower secondary level, and from 18:1 to 13:1 at the upper secondary level (UIS, 2019[11]). There is, however, significant variation across municipalities, with ratios as low as 5:1 in low density rural areas such as Pustec and Dropull (INSTAT, 2019[12]). While the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) discussed optimising the country's school network in the past, no plan was agreed (MoESY, 2014[13]). Without pro-active policies, the declining student-teacher ratio might continue in upcoming years as a significant number of teachers in Albania is young or at the mid-point in their careers, hired on a full-time civil servant contract. Only 28% of upper secondary and 26% of lower secondary teachers were above age 50 in 2018 (MoESY, 2018[14]), compared to an average of 38% and 35% respectively across the OECD in 2016 (OECD, 2018[15]).

There is a general oversupply of teachers with some areas of shortage

Albania is currently experiencing an oversupply of teachers, although some subject-specific and region-specific shortages remain (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]). For example, representatives of one education office reported to the review team that they had received 87 applications to be a language teacher for just one open position. However, as of 2015, the economically disadvantaged northeast of the country was facing particular challenges attracting teachers (UNESCO, 2017[17]). Positions with the highest number of vacancies across Albania were for teaching primary, physical education, mathematics and English-language (UNESCO, 2017[17]). Despite this, Albania does not have mechanisms in place to incentivise teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas of the country. Albania has also had difficulty attracting men to the profession, although no more than OECD countries. Women represented 85% of primary teachers in Albania compared to an average of 83% across OECD countries in 2016 (UIS, 2019[11]; OECD, 2018[15]).

Figure 3.3. Trends in the number of teachers and students in Albania (2000-2017)

Index 2000 = 100



Source: UIS (2019[11]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics,* http://uis.unesco.org (accessed on 15 July 2019).

Teacher career structure and salary progression

Albania's teacher career structure does not encourage higher levels of performance

Albania has different qualification categories for teachers that are associated with progressive salary increases. However, unlike a number of OECD countries with career structures that encourage and reward teachers for their professional growth, higher qualification categories are not associated with higher levels of performance or more complex responsibilities (Schleicher, 2012[18]). The first level in Albania's teacher career structure is "teacher" followed by the three regulated qualification categories of "qualified", "specialist" and "master" (see Table 3.1). Promotion is based on years of experience, the accumulation of accredited continuous professional development credits on any topic, and an appraisal process that is primarily exam-based. Although teachers can take on different roles throughout their careers (e.g. mentor, subject team head), these are not explicitly connected to the qualification categories.

Table 3.1. Teacher career structure in Albania

Qualification category	Years of work experience required	Salary increase	Number as of 2018-19 (primary to upper secondary)
Qualified	At least 5	5% salary increase over a "teacher"	4 982
Specialist	At least 10	10% salary increase over qualified teacher	7 949
Master	At least 20	10% salary increase over specialist teacher	10 681

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018[19]), *Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances* 2016/17, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/teacher_and_school_head_salaries_2016_17.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019); MoESY Statistics Centre (2019[20]), *Teacher qualifications based on the pre-university education levels*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Teachers' salary progression is relatively flat

Teachers' average salaries are comparable to other professions in the public sector but their salary progression is flat by international standards. As of 2017, the average gross monthly teachers' salary in Albania across school levels was 466 euros, and the average monthly salary for general upper secondary teachers was 490 euros (Council of Ministers, 2017[21]). This was higher than the average monthly salary for Albania's public sector employees (387 euros) in 2015 (UNESCO, 2017[17]). Teachers' salaries grow by 2% each year to match the annual rate of inflation, with more significant increases when teachers advance to a new qualification category (Council of Ministers, 2017[21]). It takes an Albanian teacher about 25 years to reach the top of the salary scale, which is comparable to the average of 28 years that it takes teachers in Europe to reach theirs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[19]). However, the maximum salary in Albania is only 1.2 times larger than the minimum (The World Bank, 2019[22]). This is significantly smaller than the average difference across OECD countries (1.8), as well as in other European countries such as Lithuania (1.4), Slovak Republic (1.7) and Slovenia (1.8) (OECD, 2018[15]).

Initial teacher education

Pre-tertiary teachers are required to obtain a master's degree

Initial teacher education is offered by nine public universities, including the University of Tirana and University of Elbasan, as well as some private higher education institutions. Albania's teachers are required to obtain a second-cycle (master's) degree in order to be certified to teach in the country's public schools at the primary and secondary level. This is a higher academic requirement to become a primary teacher than in two-thirds of OECD countries (OECD, 2014[23]). Initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers are four or five years in length. Those for secondary teachers are two years in length and, as consecutive initial teacher education programmes, completed after obtaining a three-year first cycle degree in a particular subject. The length of initial teacher training is comparable to the average in OECD countries for all levels (OECD, 2014[23]).

Albania is making efforts to improve the initial preparation of teachers

There is no core content common to all initial teacher education programmes in Albania and significant variation exists across programmes. Research conducted in Albania in 2016 found that programmes were not sufficiently addressing the new pre-tertiary curriculum (AQAPUE, 2016[24]). The practicum component has also been a particular weakness, with some programmes lacking sufficient practice teaching opportunities.

The ministry is taking steps to improve the quality of initial teacher education programmes, but progress is slow. Albania passed a Higher Education Law in 2015 to standardise the curriculum content of second-cycle initial teacher education programmes, but this change has not yet taken effect. The government has brought together working groups of university representatives to develop standards describing the competencies teacher candidates should develop in different curriculum areas. However, this work is not aligned with the country's existing teaching standards.

Albania recently raised the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers

Albania has strengthened entry requirements for initial teacher education programmes in response to concerns about the calibre of entrants. In the past, entrants had lower grade point averages than those applying to other programmes such as sociology and sciences (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[25]; Haxhiymeri and Mita, 2015[26]). Beginning in 2018, applicants to initial teacher education programmes at the bachelor's degree level were required to have an average mark of 7 out of 10 in their combined upper secondary education and State Matura Examination results, compared to an average of 6.5 for other bachelor's programmes. The required average mark was increased again to 7.5 for the 2019-20 school year (Gazetta Shqiptare, 2019[27]). A comparable change has not been made to the admission requirements for consecutive initial teacher education programmes leading to a master's degree. This means that there is no minimum requirement for entry to programmes that prepare future secondary teachers.

Quality assurance mechanisms are not yet fully implemented

None of the initial teacher education programmes offered by Albania's nine public universities have been subject to an external quality assurance review (although programmes offered by private providers have been accredited). The accreditation of public higher education programmes by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education began in 2019. However, public providers of initial teacher education programmes will reportedly not seek programme accreditation until the curriculum standards described above have been finalised.

Teachers' continuous professional development

Albania has a centralised process for identifying teachers' training needs at the national level. The Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-University Education (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency), formerly the Education Development Institute (see Chapter 1), oversees teachers' professional development in Albania and works with the ministry to develop a list of teachers' training needs every four years. This list is based on a survey of teachers, exam and international student assessment results, and curriculum changes, among other sources. It informs the Quality Assurance Agency's development of mandatory training on national education priorities. It is also used to accredit training modules that are offered to teachers by a range of providers, including higher education institutions, private agencies and non-governmental organisations. Over the past several years, Albania has made efforts to ensure the implementation of accreditation and monitoring processes to assure the quality of the training programmes.

Teachers lack support to identify their individual learning needs

Individual teachers receive little to no guidance about which training would help them address their own learning needs. Teachers are required to complete three days of accredited training (equivalent to six hours per day and one credit in total) per year in order to be eligible for promotion to a higher qualification category. They can take training on any topic, and there is some evidence that they sign up for modules that are perceived to be the easiest (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[25]). This suggests that teachers participate in training for credit accumulation rather than for genuine learning and development.

Funding for continuous professional development is limited

The continuous professional development of teachers is underfunded (European Commission, 2017[28]). The Quality Assurance Agency's predecessor, the Education Development Institute, lacked the funds to provide teachers with more than a day of mandatory training on curriculum changes per year, which stakeholders described as insufficient to meet teachers' needs. The state budget that is disseminated regionally and locally includes funding for teachers' continuous professional development, but this is mostly used to co-ordinate and organise the professional learning networks. No funds are passed on to schools or teachers to subsidise training. While Albania has made efforts to reduce the cost of training modules that lead to credits for promotion, teachers interviewed by the review team still found it prohibitive.

Albania is promoting teachers' collaborative learning

Albania has introduced an innovative method for delivering professional development to teachers. Professional learning networks provide the majority of teacher training on curriculum changes and national education priorities using the train-the-trainer method. There are 1 038 across the country. The ministry's local education offices organise the networks and appoint a teacher or principal as a professional network manager to lead discussions and act as chief trainer. The Quality Assurance Agency trains these managers on priority education areas but not on how to facilitate teachers' learning. Each network includes up to 30 teachers and principals from three to five schools, all of whom share the same teaching profile (i.e. teach the same subject or the same level).

Teachers reported to the review team that the networks are helpful but that they have not led to changes to their practices, in part because principals are not expected to help teachers mobilise what they have learnt in their schools. There is also no alignment between the work of the professional learning networks and school subject teams. The latter are teacher-led groups that are also organised by teaching profile. They conduct learning activities for teachers in each school (e.g. discussions, classroom observations), but they do not receive any central or local guidance or resources for their work.

Teacher appraisal in Albania

Albania has four distinct teacher appraisal processes, including appraisal for initial certification, promotion and reward, and regular annual appraisal. However, the appraisal processes are not well-designed to encourage teachers to continuously learn and develop their competencies. For example, appraisal for promotion includes a review of the teacher's portfolio of work, but the majority of the appraisal is based on a written exam that does not authentically measure teaching competence.

Table 3.2. Teacher appraisal in Albania

Types of appraisal		Reference standards	Body responsible	Guideline documents	Process	Frequency	Use
Initial certification	Completion of initial teacher education	None	Faculties of education	None	Students must obtain a second-cycle university degree	Once	Allows graduates to apply for the internship
	Appraisal of interns	Eight competencies in the Practice Teacher Evaluation form	Mentor, principal, and Internship Appraisal Committee of the local education office	Order 336 (14.07.2011)	Two stages. 1) Appraisal by mentor based on classroom observations, interviews, and a portfolio review. The principal also assesses two competencies. 2) Appraisal by Internship Appraisal Committee based on an interview, a portfolio review, and the results of the mentor's appraisal	Once, at the end of the internship	For completion of internship and approval to take the state exam
	State exam	None	Educational Services Centre; initial teacher education lecturers draft the exam questions	None	Conducted electronically twice per year. 50 multiple-choice questions on knowledge of subject area (70%) and methodology, curriculum and pedagogy (30%)	Once, after successful completion of the internship	For teacher certification
Regular appraisal		Standards are not used, although there are Professional Standards of Elementary Teachers, and Professional Standards of Lower and Upper Secondary Teachers	Principal or deputy principal	None. National guidelines are currently being developed by the Quality Assurance Agency	Based on the teacher's annual plan, portfolio and classroom observations	Annually	To improve teaching and learning outcomes
Appraisal for promotion		None	Portfolio Evaluation Commission of the local education office; the Quality Assurance Agency (exam)	None. The Quality Assurance Agency sets out the exam topics	Two stages. 1) Portfolio review by the local education office. 2) Written exam	Voluntary for teachers with requisite work experience and professional development credits	For promotion to a higher qualification category and salary increase
Appraisal for reward		None	Varies by reward; ministry, local education offices and schools	None	Varies. May be based on criteria like regular appraisal results and student achievement on national exams	Annually	For monetary reward

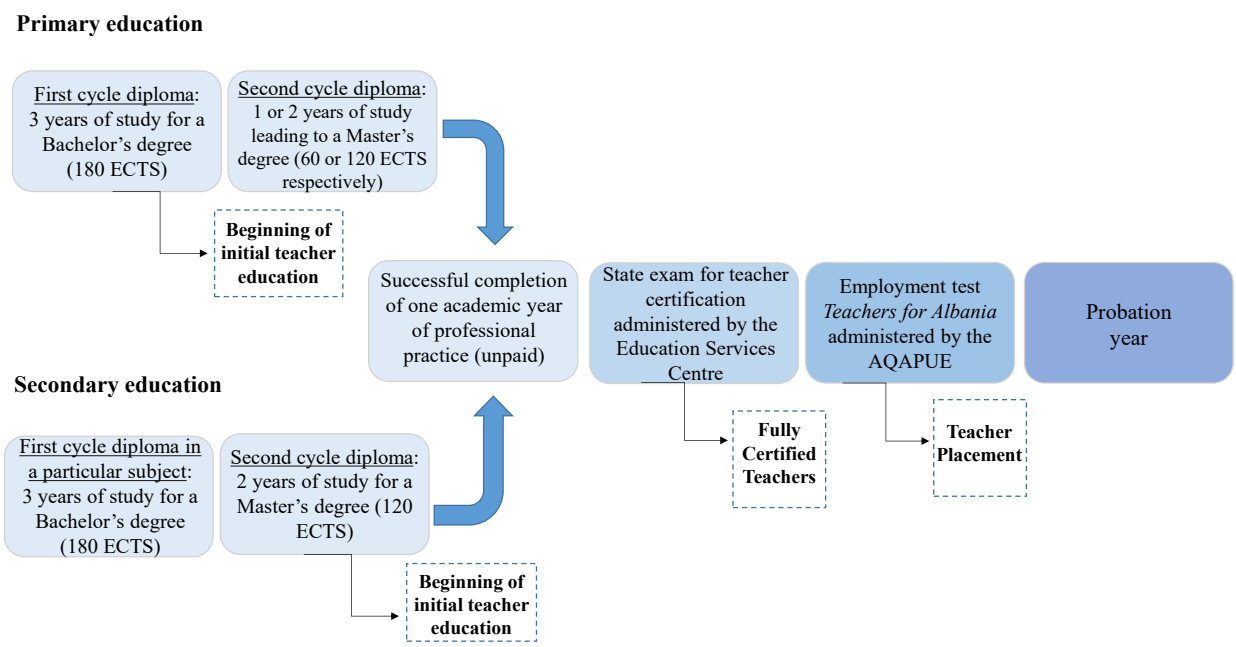
Teaching standards have been developed but are not used consistently

Albania first introduced standards for teachers in 2013 and revised them in 2016. These *Professional Teaching Standards* cover all of the areas of teaching that research recognises as important (i.e. planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities) (Danielson, 2013[29]). They also reference the use of student-centred teaching practices related to the new pre-tertiary curriculum (e.g. conducting performance-based assessments of higher-order competencies). However, they are not used consistently in the education system. For example, while the Quality Assurance Agency may take the standards into account when identifying teachers' training needs, they are not commonly used for teacher appraisal nor to inform initial teacher education programme design and accreditation. Contrary to practice in a growing number of OECD countries, the teaching standards in Albania are not differentiated according to the career structure; teachers at different qualification categories are not expected to demonstrate different levels of competency in relation to each standard.

Requirements for initial certification and entry to the profession are onerous

In Albania, new graduates of initial teacher education programmes must complete an unpaid academic year of professional practice, or internship, in a school, pass a state exam for certification and pass another competitive test to gain employment (see Figure 3.4). This entry to the profession is more onerous than in most OECD and European countries. It may make teaching a less attractive profession to the best students, particularly those who are concerned about financial constraints.

Figure 3.4. Different steps required to be a fully certified and employed teacher in Albania



Internship is unpaid and does not lead to employment in the placement school

The year of professional practice was first introduced as a requirement for teacher certification in Albania in 2011, reportedly to address concerns that initial teacher

education programmes were not consistently providing teacher candidates with sufficient practice teaching opportunities. The internship is considered part of initial teacher education. This model is unusual across Europe, but where it does exist (e.g. Austria, France, Germany and Luxembourg), interns are generally remunerated for their work, unlike in Albania (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]). This means that teacher candidates in Albania must wait five or six years for their first paid teaching position, given the length of initial teacher education and the internship. In contrast to OECD countries, the internship in Albania does not lead to employment in the school in which the intern is placed (Duda, Golubeva and Clifford-Amos, 2013[30]). Once employed, new teachers do not receive supports, such as a formal induction or mentorship programme, to help orient them to their new school or become effective in their first classroom.

There are challenges associated with mentorship during the internship. Interns work in a school under the supervision of an experienced teacher mentor, but there is no mandatory training for the mentor role. While there are regulated selection criteria (e.g. mentors should have reached the "specialist" qualification category), the country has found it difficult to find a sufficient number of teachers who meet them (MoESY, 2014[13]). Mentors are supposed to have a reduced teaching workload, with one quarter being covered by their intern, but this does not always happen in practice (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[25]).

Interns are appraised during their year of professional practice

The appraisal of interns during their year of professional practice is based on multiple sources of evidence and involves appraisers who are internal and external to the school. While this is positive, appraisers receive no training and limited support for their role in the appraisal process. In the first stage of the appraisal, the intern's mentor conducts classroom observations, interviews and a review of the intern's portfolio, which contains evidence of teaching practices (e.g. sample methods used to develop students' cross-curricular competencies) and a self-appraisal. The mentor completes a Practice Teacher Evaluation Form in which they appraise the intern against eight practising teacher competencies according to a four-point scale (very good, good, sufficient and poor). In the second stage, a five-person Internship Appraisal Committee established by the head of the local education office decides whether the intern has successfully completed the internship. This is based on a review of the mentor's Practice Teacher Evaluation Form and the portfolio, as well as an interview. Successful completion means that the intern can take the state exam for certification. An initial poor result leads to an extension of the internship, while multiple poor results mean that the intern has failed the internship.

New teachers must pass two exams in order to be certified and gain employment

In Albania, new entrants to the teaching profession must pass the state exam for teacher certification and then the Teachers for Albania competitive employment test in order to be eligible for employment (see Table 3.3). The state exam was first implemented in 2012. National data indicate that, in 2018, it was taken by 2 278 novice teachers. The Teachers for Albania test was introduced in 2014 with the intent of making the hiring of teachers more meritocratic and transparent. Approximately 5 000 teachers who are seeking employment take it each year (MoESY, 2018[14]), including new teachers, unemployed teachers and those who have been made redundant by a reduction in their teaching load. Although the tests are used for different purposes, they cover some of the same content areas.

Table 3.3. Albania's teacher certification and placement exams

	The State Exam for Teacher Certification	The Teachers for Albania Test
Institution	Educational Services Centre	Quality Assurance Agency
Components	Subject knowledge Pedagogy - Questions are based on the curriculum of the initial teacher education programme	Subject knowledge Methodology and pedagogy Official school documentation Communication and ethics Spelling of the Albanian language - Questions are based on the pre-tertiary curriculum
Eligibility criteria	Successfully completing initial teacher education	Successfully passing the state exam
Question format	50 multiple-choice questions	Multiple-choice questions
Grading	Candidates must earn 50% on the exam to pass	There is no cut-off mark. Teachers are ranked for appointment to the different local education offices to which they have applied based on a combination of the points they are awarded for: a national review of their application file (e.g. state exam results, grade point average in initial teacher education); and their results on the Teachers for Albania test.
Primary purpose	Certification	Placement in public schools

Source: MoESY (2018[14]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Tirana.

Albania no longer conducts appraisals for probation

Until recently, all teachers who were newly appointed to a school were appraised for completion of probation by the principal in their first year of employment. This appraisal was discontinued in 2019. The appraisal included classroom observations and a review of students' marks. The principal was required to take into account the opinion of the school's parent council and the psycho-social services commission in the regional education directorate or local education office. These bodies were not provided with guidance or training for this responsibility, and they determined the methods they would use to form their opinion of the teacher. If their assessment was negative, the teacher's employment was terminated. Internationally, parental involvement in this type of high-stakes teacher appraisal is not common. Parents generally lack pedagogical expertise and a firm understanding of the characteristics associated with high-quality teaching (OECD, 2013[1]).

Regular appraisal is not developmental

Teachers in Albania are subject to a regular appraisal by their principal (or deputy principal) on an annual basis, but it is more of an administrative process than one that supports their ongoing development. Unlike the practice in a majority of European countries, results are not used to identify teachers' professional development needs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]). The appraisal includes an assessment of the teacher's annual plan, which consists primarily of numerical targets in relation to six areas

(e.g. students' estimated and actual grade point averages, the teachers' professional development credits, papers presented, the percentage of absences) rather than qualitative descriptions of teachers' performance and learning objectives. Teachers are also required to maintain a portfolio, but it contains only administrative material (e.g. CV, training certificates) rather than evidence of teaching practice. Classroom observations, which are part of principals' regular weekly duties, are supposed to inform the appraisal, but they are not clearly integrated into the process and are not systematically used as a source of evidence in providing feedback to teachers. The Quality Assurance Agency plans to develop guidelines to support implementation of the appraisal, but at present, appraisers do not receive preparation or guidance for their role.

Appraisal for promotion to a higher qualification category does not assess higher levels of competency

Teachers seeking promotion are appraised in a similar manner and against the same competencies regardless of the qualification category. By contrast, the majority of European education systems with multi-level career structures require teachers to demonstrate specific competencies in order to be promoted (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]). The appraisal includes two stages: a portfolio review and a written exam. A three-person Portfolio Evaluation Commission appointed by the head of the local education office conducts the portfolio review. While the portfolio provides authentic evidence of teachers' work (e.g. an annual subject plan, a model lesson demonstrating student-centred teaching practices), the majority of the appraisal (70 out of 100 points) is based on the results of the exam. Testing teachers for career advancement, rather than assessing teachers' work in the classroom and school, is uncommon among OECD countries (OECD, 2015[7]). The exam is developed by the Quality Assurance Agency and consists of questions in two parts: (1) official documents, subject programmes, teaching and learning methodology, ethics and communication, spelling and the Albanian language; and (2) the scientific content of the subject. Teachers are granted an overall score out of 100 on the appraisal, resulting in a rating of excellent (A), very good (B), good (C), fair (D), or poor (E). Teachers must earn the minimum points (or 50%) on both parts of the exam in order to pass. Teachers' regular appraisal results are not reviewed as part of the appraisal for promotion process, which means that promotion decisions do not take into account the input of individuals who regularly monitor teachers' performance (OECD, 2013[1]).

Appraisals for reward are conducted at multiple levels of the education system

The ministry, local education offices, and schools each conduct a yearly competition to grant a financial reward to one teacher for their products or outputs (e.g. projects relating to subjects of the curriculum, innovations in teaching) and/or the achievement of their students in arts, sports, literature or science. Each school also issues a financial reward to the teacher "most qualified for professional merit" based on a vote of the Teachers' Council. Rewarding individual teachers for student outcomes is not common among OECD countries (OECD, 2015[7]). It risks rewarding teachers for factors that are beyond their control, such as student motivation, family support and school resources, all of which can impact student learning (OECD, 2013[1]). Given that regular appraisal results may be among the criteria used to rank teachers (MoESY, 2018[14]), these rewards may also reinforce the view that teachers should demonstrate achievement in this appraisal rather than treat it as an opportunity for learning and growth. There is also limited trust among teachers and school actors that decisions about granting the rewards are made transparently, in particular for rewards granted at the local education office level.

Policy issues

Albania has made efforts to improve student learning outcomes by introducing a number of education reforms, including a new competency-based curriculum and a new assessment framework more focused on formative assessment. These reforms necessitate a deep shift in methods towards more student-centred teaching. To support this, Albania should introduce a new teacher career structure and appraisal for promotion process that reward teachers for continuously developing their competencies. Unlike the present appraisal process, a new system should require teachers to demonstrate more advanced competencies to access higher career stages. Teachers should be appraised against revised teaching standards that help to re-orient teaching practices and build understanding among teachers about the changing expectations of their role.

In addition, improvements to initial teacher preparation and supports for teachers in their first year of employment will help to boost new teachers' effectiveness. A more developmental regular appraisal process that is focused on addressing teachers' learning needs, as well as greater investment in continuous professional development, will also support teachers' professional growth. Albania should pay particular attention to improving the capacity of collaborative professional learning networks and school subject teams.

Policy issue 3.1. Encouraging teachers to improve their competencies throughout their career

Albania's appraisal for promotion process does not encourage or reward high levels of performance. The appraisal is based primarily on the results of an exam that assesses teachers for the same minimum level of knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Remuneration is tied more to teachers' years of experience than their performance or duties. This is contrary to practices in a growing number of OECD countries that use their career structures to motivate teachers to continuously develop and share their expertise by taking on more complex tasks (Schleicher, 2012[18]). Albania should revise their career structure to connect higher career stages to higher levels of competency and new roles and responsibilities for teachers, in addition to higher pay. This should be underpinned by a new appraisal process that assesses whether teachers have the knowledge and skills they will need for a new career stage.

Recommendation 3.1.1. Create a teacher career structure that encourages teachers to develop higher competency levels

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency will need to consider what type of career structure would best serve Albania's needs. In developing a new structure, they will need to formalise the relationship between career stages and teacher roles and responsibilities. They will also need to identify the competencies teachers should have at different career stages and ensure that teachers have professional learning opportunities to develop those competencies.

Consider developing a two-track career structure

The ministry should consider developing a career structure with two tracks: one for teaching and one for leadership. This type of career structure would encourage teachers to develop competencies to assume duties related to pedagogy (e.g. mentor) or leadership (e.g. subject team head, deputy principal or principal). In this way, it would support teachers' professional growth without requiring them to leave the classroom and also better prepare

future school leaders (see Chapter 4). In developing such a model, the ministry can learn from the experience of Singapore, which was one of the leading countries to develop a multi-tack career structure for teachers (see Box 3.1).

In the new career structure, Albania could (see Table 3.4):

- include "novice teacher" as an initial career stage that corresponds with a probation/induction year;
- diverge the career structure into teaching and leadership tracks after a second "teacher" level; and
- include distinct career stages within each track.

For example, the teaching track could contain three or more stages, similar to the number of existing qualification categories (qualified, specialist and master). Three- to five-stage differentiated career structures exist in a number of OECD countries (OECD, 2019[31]).

Box 3.1. Singapore's multi-track teacher career structure

In Singapore, teachers can opt for three horizontally differentiated tracks during their career development: the teaching track, the leadership track and the senior specialist track. Each one contains multiple stages or positions, with corresponding salaries. Teachers can move between tracks providing they satisfy the standards and criteria for a particular position.

The teaching track is for teachers who want to further develop their pedagogical capacity. It includes four stages, beginning with Senior Teacher and ending with Principal Master Teacher. The leadership track is intended to identify school leaders as early as possible in their teaching career and help them develop their leadership skills. It includes eight stages that encompass school and system leadership positions. Finally, the specialist track is intended to support educational development. This track is designed for teachers who want to specialise in a specific area of knowledge (e.g. educational psychologists).

Promotion along the teaching track is informed by the results of annual performance appraisals over a period of three years and the review of a professional portfolio containing evidence of teaching practice. Teachers are appraised against competencies and standards that relate to each stage of the career track. Once promoted, the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education (NIE) offer teachers free courses and trainings for their new positions.

Source: Lay Choo, T. and Darling-Hammond, L. (2011[32]), Creating Effective Teachers and Leaders in Singapore, *Teacher and Leader Effectiveness in High-Performing Education Systems*, http://edpolicy.stanford.edu (accessed on 25 September 2019).

Establish roles and responsibilities for the stages of the career structure

Unlike differentiated teacher career structures in other countries, Albania's qualification categories are only loosely connected to the country's existing teacher roles and responsibilities. For example, selection criteria for some roles, like subject team heads and professional network managers, reference years of work experience rather than specific qualification categories. In other countries, like Singapore, the connection between career stages and teacher roles and responsibilities is much more explicit (see Box 3.1). The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should work to link teacher roles and responsibilities to each career stage within each track of the new career structure. This

should involve a review of existing roles and responsibilities and consideration of new ones that could be created to support the country's education reform efforts. For example, the role of "instructional coach" could be created to help teachers develop their teaching methods. In the teaching track, roles and responsibilities would support teachers' professional learning and classroom instruction, while in the leadership track, they would support school and possibly system leadership (see Chapter 4). Table 3.4 presents a proposal for how these roles could be linked to the various career stages.

Table 3.4. Examples of roles and responsibilities for the teacher career structure

	Teaching track	Leadership track
Level 1	Novice teacher*	
Level 2	Teacher	
Level 3	Mentor of teacher candidates Mentor of novice teachers	Subject team head
Level 4	Marker of national assessments and exams Evaluator of training modules Instructional coach*	Professional network manager Deputy principal Newly appointed principal*
Level 5	Teacher trainer School assessment coordinator* Professional development coordinator* External teacher appraiser* Contracted school inspector*	Principal External teacher appraiser* Contracted school inspector*
Level 6	Curriculum designer* Pedagogical researcher* Member of teacher appointment assessment commission	Experienced principal* Local education office director

Note: Suggestions for new roles and responsibilities are marked with an *.
Source: Authors.

Revise the professional teaching standards to define competencies associated with different levels in the teacher career structure

Albania's teaching standards do not provide teachers with a sense of the knowledge and skills they need to develop in order to advance in their careers, nor do they support appraisers in evaluating whether teachers are ready for promotion. To address this, Albania should revise the standards to identify the competencies teachers will need for each career stage. The revised standards and related competencies should be clear, specific and relatively detailed. This will help to ensure a common understanding of what good teaching looks like to guide a new appraisal for promotion process (see below). The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers provide an example of this approach (see Box 3.2).To support effective teaching throughout a teacher's career and to reinforce the shift towards more student-centred practices, the revised standards and related competencies should be used to inform:

- the design, approval and accreditation of initial teacher education programmes (see Policy issue 3.2);
- the contents of the state exam for entry to the profession (see Policy issue 3.2);
- all types of teacher appraisal; and
- the development of continuous professional learning activities for teachers.

Box 3.2. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is responsible for developing and refining the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. In 2009, they consulted with all key education stakeholders, including teachers, teachers' associations and unions to draft new standards. They then contracted a university to conduct a psychometric validation of the draft standards that included two online national surveys and focus group workshops in every state and territory in the country, which gathered input from 6 000 teachers across hundreds of schools.

The teaching standards are organised into three domains of teaching: professional knowledge, practice and professional engagement. Each standard includes descriptors of expected competencies at four career stages, from graduate to lead teacher. They are used to inform the continuum of a teacher's development. For example, "graduate" competencies are used to accredit initial teacher education programmes. They also serve as a quality-assurance mechanism by providing consistent benchmarks to assess teachers' performance, and a means to recognise high-quality teaching.

The following table shows the competency descriptors for one component of *Standard 5: Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning*:

	Focus area 5.1: Assess student learning
Graduate	Demonstrate understanding of assessment strategies, including informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative approaches to assess student learning
Proficient	Develop, select and use informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment strategies to assess student learning
Highly accomplished	Develop and apply a comprehensive range of assessment strategies to diagnose learning needs, comply with curriculum requirements and support colleagues to evaluate the effectiveness of their approaches to assessment
Lead	Evaluate school assessment policies and strategies to support colleagues with: using assessment data to diagnose learning needs, complying with curriculum, system and/or school assessment requirements and using a range of assessment strategies

Source: OECD (2013[33]), *Teachers for the 21st Century: Using Evaluation to Improve Teaching*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264193864-en; AITSL (2011[34]), Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/apst-resources/australian_professional_standard_for_teachers_final.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019).

Consult with teachers on revisions to the teaching standards

Albania's current teaching standards are not widely used. It is unclear whether practising teachers were involved in their development. Internationally, bodies that work for and with teachers, like the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, often take responsibility for consulting teachers on the development of standards (see Box 3.2).This is essential to ensure teachers feel ownership of the standards and support their use to measure performance (OECD, 2010[35]). In Albania, the Quality Assurance Agency should conduct national consultations with experienced practising teachers, representatives of the teachers' unions and other key education stakeholders on the revisions and the development of new competency levels.

Offer professional learning opportunities that allow teachers to develop competencies for career advancement

Teachers in Albania are required to accumulate one credit of training per year to be eligible for promotion to a higher qualification category. They are not encouraged to participate in training to address weaknesses or strengthen their capabilities rather than simply earn credits. To support teachers' professional growth in areas identified as key to effective teaching and career advancement, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should:

- **Develop and accredit training modules that relate to the revised teaching standards**. At present, Albania categorises accredited training topics into five fields (i.e. ethics, communication and pedagogy; curriculum planning; teaching and learning; cross-curricular; and ICT in teaching and learning). These fields are broad and do not align precisely with the teaching standards. In the future, the revised teaching standards should be a key document that informs the systematic development and accreditation of training modules for teachers. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency might also consider collecting aggregate data on regular teacher appraisal results to determine particular areas of training needed in relation to the revised standards (see Policy issue 3.3).
- **Clearly communicate professional development opportunities to teachers**. The Quality Assurance Agency's predecessor, the Education Development Institute, developed a portal to provide information to teachers about accredited training modules. While it is a helpful resource, the Quality Assurance Agency could re-design it to provide greater guidance to teachers about training that would meet their needs. For example, the portal should clearly identify the different teaching standards to which training modules relate. It should also allow teachers to search for available training modules by targeted standard rather than by training agency.

Recommendation 3.1.2. Revise the appraisal for promotion process to ensure teachers' readiness to take on new roles and responsibilities

In Albania, the type of exam that is used in the appraisal for promotion process may be appropriate to measure a baseline threshold for entry to the profession. However, it is not well designed to meaningfully assess whether teachers have developed knowledge, skills and attitudes for the next stage of their careers. Albania should replace the exam with a process that draws on real evidence of teachers' work to assess whether they have developed the competencies to take on new roles and responsibilities.

This will not only make the appraisal a more authentic measure of teachers' competencies but also encourage teachers' continuous development. Albania should also ensure that appraisals are undertaken by well-trained and objective appraisers.

Draw on multiple sources of evidence to authentically assess teachers' competencies and motivation

Albania should revise the appraisal for promotion process to gather multiple sources of evidence of teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes. This will ensure that the appraisal, which has such high stakes for a teacher's career, is based on as much evidence of a teacher's work as possible (OECD, 2013[1]). To ensure consistent judgements are made about teachers' performance, their work should be appraised against the competency levels in the revised teaching standards. The appraisal process should vary as teachers advance in their careers. Teachers should be required to demonstrate, and appraisers should look for, evidence of more complex competencies for higher career stages. For example, when

reviewing a portfolio or conducting a site visit to appraise a teacher for the highest levels of the teaching track, appraisers might look for evidence that teachers are having an impact not just on their students' learning but also on other teachers' practices.

A combination of the following sources would provide broad evidence of teachers' competencies:

- **Revised professional portfolios**. In the current appraisal for promotion process, the portfolio provides evidence of teachers' classroom practices (e.g. lesson plans demonstrating student-centred teaching practices). While this is positive, the portfolio does not relate to the teaching standards. As such, it does not allow appraisers to determine whether teachers possess the knowledge and skills that are most important to their role. Albania should revise the portfolio to require teachers to include material that demonstrates that they have developed competencies for a specific career stage in relation to the teaching standards.
- **Classroom observations or site visits**. Observations of teachers' interactions with students are the most important source of information for all types of teacher appraisal (OECD, 2013[1]). They offer a wealth of direct evidence of teaching that cannot be gleaned from proxies of teaching quality like portfolios.
- **Interviews**. These provide opportunities for appraisers to ask teachers questions to assess their readiness for career advancement, as well as to obtain information about the thinking that lies behind the teaching practices that are observed in the classroom (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007[36]).
- **Qualitative input from the teacher's regular appraiser**. Currently, a copy of the results of a teacher's regular appraisal is included in the portfolio, but it is not used to inform decisions about promotion. In order to obtain a full picture of a teacher's performance, research recommends that career advancement appraisals take into account input from those involved in the regular, school-based appraisal of teachers (OECD, 2013[1]). In Albania, this could mean that appraisers collect a written statement from the teacher's principal or conduct an interview with them during the site visit that addresses how the teacher's regular appraisal results and performance demonstrate readiness for promotion.

Albania might consider introducing a staged appraisal process to ensure efficiency while also making sure that final appraisal decisions are based on a range of evidence. For example, in Australia's appraisal for Highly Accomplished Teacher or Lead Teacher status, teachers must initially complete a first stage in which two appraisers review their documentation (e.g. evidence of teaching practice, observation reports from an in-school appraiser). Teachers who pass are eligible for a second stage, which includes a site visit and interviews with the teacher and their referees (AITSL, 2017[37]).

Create a new cadre of external evaluators to undertake appraisal for promotion

Albania's current Portfolio Evaluation Commissions in local education offices would not be appropriate evaluators for the appraisal for promotion process outlined above. Members include a curriculum specialist in the local education office, a principal and an experienced teacher. They are not trained for their role as appraisers, which is essential to ensure that appraisals are conducted effectively (OECD, 2013[1]). Appraisers should also have in-depth and preferably recent experience in the classroom so that they can make meaningful judgements about teachers' performance. This is not a requirement for all members of the commission.

To ensure that appraisers are highly-proficient educators and well-prepared, Albania should consider contracting and training external appraisers to conduct the revised appraisal for promotion process. External appraisers could include experienced teachers, and staff of the Quality Assurance Agency with high levels of competency in pedagogy. This would allow staff in local education offices to focus their efforts on supporting schools rather than appraising teachers. It would also be a financially feasible approach, unlike funding dedicated appraisal staff within each local education office. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should establish procedures for the selection of the external appraisers. The Quality Assurance Agency or a national committee within the Quality Assurance Agency (see below) should select, contract and train them either centrally or in partnership with regional directorates. In developing this new approach, Albania could look to Chile as an example of a country where contracted experienced teachers are well-trained to serve as external evaluators (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Experienced teachers as appraisers in Chile

One key characteristic of Chile's teacher appraisal approach (*Docentemás*) is the high involvement of practising teachers as evaluators. Practising teachers can apply to two key roles in the appraisal process: (1) as evaluators of teacher portfolios in one of the centres set up for this purpose by *Docentemás* in various universities; and (2) as peer evaluators who conduct peer interviews and participate in the municipal evaluation commissions.

For both roles, intensive preparation processes have been set up to build the capacity of those selected. The portfolio evaluators are trained in a one-week training session, where they work together with specialists on concrete examples of different performance levels. The training sessions comprise individual and group work in which teachers discuss judgements about proficiency levels. This is followed by a test period where the evaluators apply what they have learnt, internalise the portfolio evaluation processes and benefit from group discussion about the results. The peer evaluators are selected and trained by the national *Docentemás* team or the local university in charge of the process. Only teachers who have been previously rated as Outstanding or Proficient can apply to become peer evaluators.

They receive training in two full-day seminars, during which they learn about the six questions to be asked in the interview and the rubrics to be applied in assigning performance levels. The training also includes exercises and feedback to the participants. At the end of this training phase, there is another selection process and not all of those initially selected will be retained as peer evaluators.

Source: Santiago et al. (2013[2]), *Teacher Evaluation in Chile 2013*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264172616-en.

Establish a national committee to oversee appraisal for promotion

Albania should consider establishing a national committee of teaching experts to manage the appraisal for promotion process. The committee would oversee the work of the contracted external evaluators. Albania could initially create this committee within the Quality Assurance Agency. This would be consistent with the agency's role in developing the teaching standards and supporting teachers' professional growth. It would ensure that the appraisal process is managed by individuals with a sophisticated understanding of teaching as it is practised throughout a teacher's career. This committee could also be responsible for the appraisal for registration process (see Policy issue 3.2).

In the long term, Albania might consider establishing a separate professional self-regulatory body for teachers to take responsibility for the teaching standards and the requirements for teachers' certification and promotion. This would help Albania to create a stronger professional identity for teachers, making them accountable for the performance and development of their profession. This type of professional body exists in a number of different OECD countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom (Scotland) and New Zealand.

Provide guidelines and tools to support the work of external appraisers

Appraisers are not currently provided with clear guidance and tools to help them make consistent assessments of whether a teacher is ready for career advancement. The Quality Assurance Agency should develop guidelines that clearly describe how appraisers should conduct each element of the appraisal for promotion process.

The agency should also develop tools to guide appraisers' judgements to ensure that the appraisal is implemented consistently in a way that is objective and fair. Important tools would include:

- **Appraisal indicators and descriptors**. These help appraisers make consistent, objective judgements about teachers' performance. Indicators tell appraisers what criteria to look for when appraising teachers for competencies related to each standard (e.g. "clear and accurate classroom explanations") (Danielson, 2013[29]). Descriptors provide concrete descriptions of how a teacher might demonstrate the competencies. In Albania, these should help appraisers assess whether teachers are ready for advancement to a specific career stage. This is similar to the way in which descriptors of competencies are connected to career stages in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Box 3.2).
- **Interview protocols and portfolio review tools.** An interview protocol would establish the framework for the interview (e.g. the number of questions to be asked), present the appraiser with a series of questions from which they could draw, and provide rubrics to help appraisers equate answers with competency levels. Portfolio review tools could include reference material for appraisers, such as examples of portfolio documents that demonstrate different levels of performance, as well as examples of what appraisers should look for when reviewing each different portfolio document. The Teaching Council in New Zealand provides guidelines and instruments to help teachers compile their portfolios and to help appraisers review these documents (Education Council, n.d.[38]).

Make clear any additional requirements for teacher roles

In order to take on specific roles and responsibilities, teachers in Albania may be required to complete steps in addition to successfully completing the appraisal for promotion process. For example, mentors of novice teachers would be required to participate in specific training (see Policy issue 3.2). The ministry should ensure that any additional requirements for specific teacher roles are consistent, transparent and clearly communicated to the sector (e.g. on-line and in relevant guidelines).

Recommendation 3.1.3. Plan carefully for the implementation of the revised career structure

Revising a teacher career structure is a major change that requires extensive preparation. If introduced too quickly without building the framework to support implementation, it could be rejected by teachers. One essential component to support implementation of the new career structure should be a revised teacher salary scale. Teachers will need to be compensated for taking on additional roles and responsibilities connected to new career stages.

Establish a salary scale that supports the revised career structure

The ministry should work with teachers' unions and other relevant stakeholders to review and revise the salary scale to support the revised career structure. Changes should include the creation of new salary levels connected to different career stages. These should ensure that teachers receive higher compensation for taking on additional roles and responsibilities associated with those stages.

This will result in greater salary progression to better reward teachers for their experience and efforts than the salary scale that exists now, which is flat relative to OECD countries (OECD, 2018[15]).

Create a plan to place teachers in the revised career structure

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency will need to establish a clear plan for implementing the revised career structure, including placing teachers on new career levels. All new teachers could automatically be incorporated into the new system. However, Albania will need to carefully consider how to place existing teachers in the revised career structure, most of whom are already qualified, specialist or master teachers in the present structure. In the future, these teachers will be required to possess higher levels of competency and take on additional roles and responsibilities. Albania could consider two different scenarios. Either might be phased in over time to avoid overloading teachers and appraisers.

- **Optional for all existing teachers**. Under this scenario, existing teachers could opt for re-classification to a career level in the revised career structure. They would need to be willing to take on new roles and responsibilities, but they would also be eligible for a higher salary. To be re-classified, they would need to meet the requirements for a particular career level (e.g. years of experience) and successfully pass the new appraisal for promotion process. Otherwise, they would remain within the salary bracket of their qualification category under the old career structure.
- **Mandatory for all existing teachers**. Under this scenario, teachers' classification under the old career structure would expire. All existing teachers would be required to undertake the new appraisal for promotion process to be placed on the revised career structure.

Under either scenario, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency will need to ensure that the education system is well-prepared for the changes. Revisions to the salary scale, the establishment of a national committee and the contracting and training of external evaluators (see Recommendation 3.1.2) will all need to be completed prior to implementation. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should also develop a communications plan involving partners such as initial teacher education providers and forums such as the professional learning networks to ensure that new and in-service teachers clearly understand the changes to the career structure. Finally, the ministry and the

Quality Assurance Agency will need to closely monitor implementation to address any issues that arise.

Consider introducing a higher career level to incentivise the most experienced teachers

Unlike countries with typical differentiated career structures, in Albania, more teachers are in the most advanced qualification category (36%), earning the highest salary, than are in any other category (MoESY Statistics Centre, 2019[20]). Many might be re-classified to the highest level of the revised career structure under one of the scenarios described above (optional or mandatory transition to the new career structure). This will make the new merit-based career structure top heavy. It will also mean that a significant proportion of teachers - a third if all master teachers are placed in the new highest level - will have very limited incentives to continue to develop their effectiveness. To address this, Albania should consider introducing a higher level to the new career structure, above what is presently the master qualification category.

This level would be accessible only to those teachers who demonstrate the highest levels of competency. It would require teachers to take on the most complex roles and responsibilities and make them eligible for a higher salary (see Table 3.4).

Policy issue 3.2. Improving the initial preparation and selection of teachers

Albania has made efforts to improve the initial selection of teachers. Notably, the country has raised the bar for entry into some initial teacher education programmes to improve the calibre of entrants. However, Albania should also address other factors that may dissuade the best candidates from entering the teaching profession. These include the lack of teaching positions for new graduates and onerous procedures for certification. Albania is also working to improve the quality of initial teacher preparation. In so doing, it should ensure that the accreditation process requires programmes to help candidates develop the competencies they will need at the start of their careers.

Albania should also focus on strengthening the practice teaching component of initial teacher education programmes. This will provide candidates with much-needed practical preparation and will reduce the need for an internship. One gap that Albania has not yet sought to address is the lack of induction supports, such as formal mentorship, to teachers in their first teaching positions. New teachers in Albania's rural and remote schools require particular supports to address teaching challenges.

Recommendation 3.2.1. Ensure that initial teacher education programmes develop the competencies novice teachers need at the start of their careers

In Albania, initial teacher education programmes vary in quality. The revised teaching standards should help to improve quality by informing programme design and accreditation criteria. This would be consistent with practices in other European countries where teacher competency frameworks commonly define what teacher candidates should know and be able to do by the end of their initial teacher education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]).

Use the teaching standards for novice teachers to inform the contents and accreditation of initial teacher education programmes

To improve the quality of initial teacher education programmes, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should work with university representatives to:

- **Develop specific accreditation criteria based on the novice teacher competencies defined in the teaching standards**. The ministry, the Quality Assurance Agency and their partners should work with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education to introduce specific accreditation criteria that focus on the outcomes of initial teacher education programmes. For example, programmes should prepare teacher candidates to deliver the new pre-tertiary curriculum by covering cross-curricular competencies, student-centred teaching methods and formative assessment. For accreditation, providers should be required to demonstrate how their programmes will help teacher candidates develop the competencies they will need as novice teachers.
- **Set out accreditation criteria in provider guidelines**. Like Ireland, Albania should develop accreditation guidelines for initial teacher education programme providers. These will clearly describe requirements for accreditation to help providers design their programmes, as well as prepare for the accreditation process (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. Criteria and guidelines for initial teacher education programme providers in Ireland

In 2010, the Teaching Council in Ireland, which accredits initial teacher education programmes, established an Advisory Group on Initial Teacher Education as part of the country's efforts to revise initial teacher preparation. The Advisory Group consisted of representatives of the Teaching Council, Ireland's Department of Education and Skills, initial teacher education providers and schools. Its main responsibility was to advise the Council on new criteria and guidelines for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes.

The criteria and guidelines for accreditation cover every level of initial teacher education programmes and every required component. They are organised into inputs, processes and outcomes. The processes are intentionally less prescriptive so that providers can exercise autonomy in developing the specific components of their individual programmes. The outcomes are based on the newly qualified teacher competencies that initial teacher education programme providers are required to demonstrate their students will acquire. The criteria and guidelines are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

The criteria and guidelines include a range of requirements related to the practicum, which they recognise as a crucial and central part of initial teacher preparation. For example, providers and schools are expected to conduct the practicum according to a written policy they develop which ensures school placements include elements like:

- A minimum of two placement settings incorporating a variety of teaching situations, class levels and school contexts. In all of these contexts, the school placement should afford student teachers the opportunity to plan and implement lessons and receive constructive feedback.
- Opportunities for the student teacher to undertake a variety of non-teaching activities, to engage with parents and co-professionals and to observe a wide range of teaching approaches.

Sources: The Teaching Council (2017[39]), *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*, http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Teacher-Education/Initial-Teacher-Education-Criteria-and-Guidelines-for-Programme-Providers.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019).

Ensure teacher candidates have sufficient practice teaching opportunities

One of the most important elements of initial teacher education is a well-designed practicum. In Albania, this element has historically been under-developed (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[25]). Weaknesses have included variations in the length and time of the practicum component across programmes and a lack of training for the mentors who supervise teacher candidates. Although initial teacher education working groups are developing advice regarding the length of the practicum (European Commission, 2018[40]), it is unclear whether they are working on other recommendations to ensure that it is of consistently high quality. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should task the working groups with developing standards for a high-quality practicum to be included in accreditation criteria. As in Ireland (see Box 3.4), these should provide general parameters for the practicum design within which universities will have autonomy to develop their own specific practices. They should cover elements like:

- **practicum structure**, including the minimum number and length of placements, and the types of opportunities they should offer teacher candidates;
- **the partnership between initial teacher education providers and schools**, including expectations for what schools should do to provide teacher candidates with meaningful learning environments;
- **mentorship,** to ensure that mentors have sufficient preparation and guidance for their role and are well-matched with teacher candidates (the Quality Assurance Agency might work with universities to develop training for mentors, in accordance with their role in developing training for mentors in a new induction programme, as recommended below); and
- **assessment**, including who should evaluate teacher candidates and how they should be assessed during the practicum.

Recommendation 3.2.2. Convert the internship into an induction programme for newly employed teachers

The structure of Albania's internship raises a number of concerns. Interns are not remunerated, which may deter talented people from entering the teaching profession. Most significantly, the internship does not lead to employment in the school in which the intern is placed. This means that newly employed teachers become responsible for their own classroom for the first time in a school environment for which they have not been prepared and without the benefit of a mentor. Albania should replace the internship with an induction programme for teachers who are employed under the first probationary contract of their careers. At the same time, Albania should work to ensure that all teacher candidates are offered high-quality practice teaching experiences during their initial preparation, as outlined above. Within the context of a new induction programme, Albania will need to improve mentorship as a key support for novice teachers and replace the appraisal of interns with a new appraisal process for completion of probation and full teacher certification.

Create an induction period to support novice teachers in their learning

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency are best placed to develop the key elements of a new induction programme for first-time teachers in their probation year. Key elements should include mentorship and other professional learning activities to develop novice teachers' skills and self-efficacy in their new teaching environment. In European countries, these commonly include structured, school-based collegial support (e.g. scheduled dialogues with the principal and colleagues, assistance with lesson planning and

assessment) and professional development activities such as courses and seminars (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]).

The ministry should be responsible for setting out any legislated elements of the overall framework of the induction programme and funding its implementation. Central funding will help to ensure that the quality of induction is consistent regardless of location. Internationally, induction funding is commonly used to cover costs such as training, including pre-service training for mentors, and release time to allow mentors and teachers to work together (European Commission, 2010[41]). Local education offices in Albania could plan and monitor implementation of the induction programme, while principals could manage implementation of induction in their schools. Box 3.5 provides a description of how these responsibilities are divided in the implementation of the New Teacher Induction Program in Ontario (Canada), as well as the key elements of the programme.

Box 3.5. New teacher induction in Ontario, Canada

Ontario (Canada) introduced a New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) in 2006. The programme is funded annually and the Ontario Ministry of Education provides district school boards with enveloped funding to implement the programme, including a base amount and a proportional amount which is a "per teacher" allocation. School boards and schools conduct the programme according to the Ministry of Education's detailed technical requirements manual. Each board has a superintendent, who is responsible for overseeing the programme, and an NTIP coordinator.

Boards are required to submit an NTIP implementation plan to the Ministry of Education prior to the beginning of each school year, and a final report, which contains a detailed summary of all NTIP expenditures, after the end of the school year.

NTIP has three key elements: orientation to the school or board, mentoring and professional learning relevant to the individual needs of new teachers.

- **Mentoring** is non-evaluative. School boards train mentors according to the Ministry of Education's curriculum framework (e.g. consultation, collaboration and coaching; developing a mentoring plan; listening and building rapport). Mentors provide support to new teachers through classroom observations, common planning time and professional dialogue, and participate in professional learning opportunities with them.
- **Professional learning** topics address areas of need identified by Ontario's new teachers (e.g. classroom management) and provincial education priorities (e.g. literacy and numeracy strategies). The Ministry of Education provides a resource guideline of core content that should be covered in school board training on each topic, as well as tools (i.e. questions and statements) to help mentors and principals talk to new teachers about their professional learning needs.
- **The appraisal of new teachers** as part of NTIP is conducted by the principal twice in the first 12 months of employment. It includes classroom observations, pre- and post-observation discussions, and a summative report. New teachers complete an Individual NTIP Strategy, in which they identify their professional learning goals and strategies to meet them, and discuss it with their mentor and principal throughout the year.

Sources: Ontario Ministry of Education (2019[42]), *New Teacher Induction Program: Induction Elements Manual*, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/NTIPInductionElements2019.pdf (accessed on 14 November 2019); Ontario Ministry of Education (2010[43]), *Teacher Performance Appraisal Technical Requirements Manual*, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/TPA_Manual_English_september2010l.pdf (accessed on 14 November 2019).

Prepare mentors and support them in their role

Mentorship, the main support provided to interns in Albania, is hampered by a lack of mentors, a lack of mandatory mentorship training, and mentors' increased workload (MoESY, 2014[13]) (Duda and Xhaferri, 2013[25]). Albania will need to address these issues in order to ensure that mentorship functions as a key support in the induction programme. If well designed, it can increase novice teachers' competence and job satisfaction, and positively impact student achievement (OECD, 2014[5]).

Albania should consider introducing the following elements, which research identifies as key to effective mentorship:

- **Mandatory training for all mentors.** The Quality Assurance Agency should develop mandatory training that leads to mentor certification and is provided by local education offices free of charge to those selected to be mentors in the induction programme. It should have a practical focus and allow for collegial learning, for example, through seminars (Hobson et al., 2009[44]). It should cover novice teacher competencies (see Recommendation 3.1.1), and how to conduct classroom observations, provide meaningful feedback, and facilitate conversations to support novice teachers' professional learning.
- **Time release and workload reduction**. Mentors and novice teachers need release time and a reduced workload to work together (Hobson et al., 2009[44]). In Scotland (United Kingdom), for example, novice teachers have 70% of a full teaching load, and mentors are allocated three and a half hours per week to fulfil their role (European Commission, 2010[41]). The ministry will need to provide induction funding to schools for release time and clear direction to local education offices and principals about how to reduce teaching loads, in addition to making it a regulated requirement.
- **Guidance and ongoing professional learning opportunities**. Some guidance is currently provided to mentors, but they lack advice on important areas such as how to help mentees develop teaching practices (Gjedia and Gardinier, 2018[45]). The Quality Assurance Agency should develop mentorship guidelines that set out expectations for the role, as well as practical resources to help mentors work with novice teachers. These could be based on surveys of mentors' needs and feedback from novice teachers. The mentor networks local education offices are currently required to organise as part of the internship programme should provide a key professional learning forum for induction mentors.
- **A careful matching process.** In the future, teachers in Albania will demonstrate that they have the competencies to become mentors by reaching the relevant stage in a new career structure (see Recommendation 3.1.1). Schools should take responsibility for matching specific mentors and novice teachers. The matching process should take into account the novice teacher's teaching profile and strengths and limitations (Hobson et al., 2009[44]). This could involve gathering input from the novice teacher on the selection of their mentor, which is a practice in Ontario (Canada) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010[46]).

Recommendation 3.2.3. Modify the internship appraisal into a probation appraisal and an appraisal for registration that are based on evidence of teaching and learning practices

The current appraisal of interns includes a number of features of appraisal for completion of probation processes that are common internationally or recommended in the research literature (e.g. the collection of multiple sources of evidence of teaching practice, the use of internal and external appraisers) (OECD, 2013[1]). However, no appraisers are trained for their role and other aspects of the appraisal are problematic. For example, interns are appraised by the mentors who are supposed to support them. Albania should address these issues by introducing two new appraisal processes that are appropriate for teachers in their induction year. One should be a school-based appraisal for completion of probation while another should be external and lead to teacher registration against national standards.

Make the principal responsible for an induction/probation appraisal

Albania should separate the functions of support and appraisal during the induction/probation year. Research suggests that mentors should not serve as appraisers because it may decrease the likelihood that novice teachers will seek out their help to address their development needs (OECD, 2010[35]). Albania should make the principal, rather than the novice teacher's mentor, responsible for appraisal. Internationally, it is common for school leaders or teachers' direct supervisors to be the in-school appraisers for completion of probation (OECD, 2013[1]). While some of the mentors' and principals' responsibilities would overlap (e.g. classroom observations) in Albania, the mentor would work much more closely with the novice teacher and would provide support within a non-judgemental learning environment.

Base the induction/probation appraisal on evidence of teaching and learning practices

During the induction/probation year, a teacher's performance should be appraised against the novice teacher competencies in the revised teaching standards. To ensure that the appraisal meaningfully assesses evidence of teaching and learning practices, it should be similar to the regular appraisal of teachers (i.e. classroom observations, a portfolio review, the creation and discussion of an individual development plan) (see Policy issue 3.3), with a few notable differences:

- **Novice teachers should complete an individual development plan** that is tailored for their use during the induction programme. In it, they could identify their professional learning goals to develop competencies related to the teaching standards and describe how they will work towards meeting them by participating in the elements of the induction programme.
- **Novice teachers will need to be closely monitored so that any problems are addressed quickly**. The ministry can, for example, consider requiring principals to conduct a preliminary appraisal of novice teachers during the induction/probation period and then a final appraisal at the end, as in Ontario (Canada) (see Box 3.5).

Replace the external component of the internship appraisal with an appraisal for registration

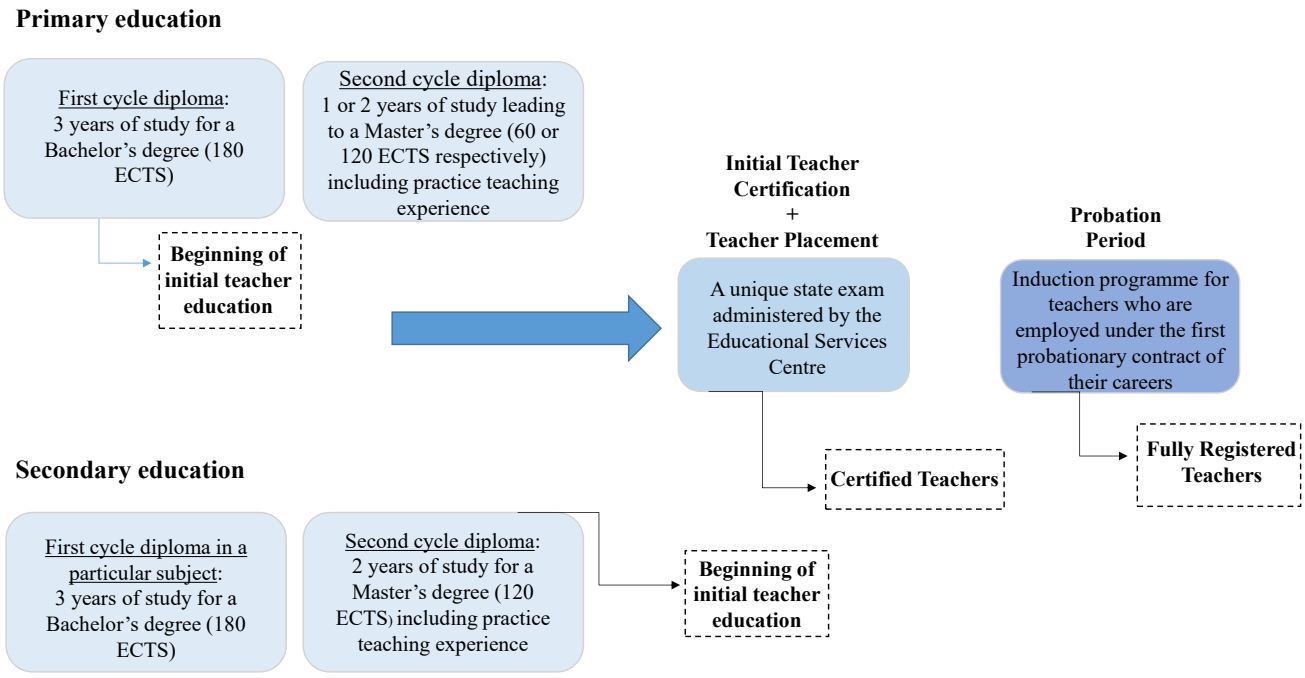
In Albania, interns are also assessed by a local Internship Appraisal Committee that is external to the school. While the involvement of external appraisers can help make appraisals objective, appraisers should be trained for their role, which is not the case in Albania. Committee members gather multiple sources of evidence of interns' practice, which is positive. However, their practice is not appraised against consistent teaching standards. Albania should introduce a new appraisal process that addresses these gaps. This process should lead to the full certification of novice teachers at the completion of their induction/probation year. It should be managed by the national committee described in Recommendation 3.1.1. As another high-stakes appraisal, it should involve some of the same key elements as the appraisal for promotion process recommended above:

- **Well-trained contracted external evaluators.** Instead of the local Internship Appraisal Committees, the contracted external evaluators recommended for the revised appraisal for promotion process could conduct this appraisal process. This would ensure that appraisers are objective, well-trained and have teaching expertise. It would also allow staff in the new regional directorates and local education offices to dedicate their time to supporting teachers rather than assessing their performance.
- **Assessment of novice teachers' performance against teaching standards.** Appraisal for full teacher certification should assess beginning teachers' performance against the novice teacher competencies in the revised teaching standards. This should be based on broad evidence of teachers' practice. In addition to conducting an interview and a portfolio review and gathering input from the novice teacher's in-school appraiser, external evaluators could conduct a classroom observation to obtain direct evidence of the teacher's practice. These sources of evidence are used in other countries for appraisal for registration (OECD, 2013[1]).

Recommendation 3.2.4. Revise requirements for initial certification and placement to assess the competencies of new graduates

Replacing the internship with an induction programme for newly employed teachers, as recommended above, would have an impact on Albania's requirements for certification and placement in a school (see Figure 3.5). Notably, completion of an internship would no longer be a certification requirement. The state exam for teacher certification, rather than being completed after the internship, would instead provide verification that graduates of initial teacher education programmes have attained a minimum level of competencies before entering the classroom. In addition, Albania should consider making other revisions to certification requirements and placement criteria to enhance quality assurance and create greater efficiency. For example, Albania should review and improve the content and methodology of the state exam to ensure that it serves as an effective and reliable measure of the skills and knowledge teachers need at the beginning of their careers.

Figure 3.5. Recommended career path of novice teachers



Revise the state exam for teacher certification

The ministry should work with the Educational Services Centre, members of the commission responsible for the state exam and the Quality Assurance Agency to review and revise the state exam to reliably assess the competencies expected of novice teachers. Specifically, Albania should:

- **Include questions on the pre-tertiary curriculum and teaching competencies.** While exam questions should still cover knowledge of subject area, they should also cover knowledge of the new pre-tertiary curriculum and related pedagogical practices, and novice teacher competencies in the revised teaching standards.
- **Consider including practice-oriented, open-ended questions**. Short essay questions could supplement multiple-choice questions to obtain a more detailed picture of teachers' subject matter and pedagogical knowledge.
- **Pilot the revised exam instruments.** A thorough pilot will help to refine the questions, as well as determine the cut-off mark for the exam, which should also be informed by the judgement of experts with an understanding of novice teachers' competencies (UNESCO, 2017[17]).
- **Conduct a comparable review of the Teachers for Albania test**. While this test asks questions about the pre-tertiary curriculum, it should also be revised to align with the revised teaching standards.

Review the criteria used to certify and place new teachers

At present, requirements for teacher certification in Albania are obtaining a master's degree in the field of education, completing a year of professional practice and passing the state exam. Albania should revise these not only to remove the year of professional practice as a requirement but also to support improvements to initial teacher preparation and selection. The ministry should consider specifying that the master's degree must be from an accredited initial teacher education programme (see Recommendation 3.2.1). This will support Albania's push for greater quality assurance at the tertiary education level by encouraging public universities to seek accreditation. Another certification requirement could include successful completion of a practicum that meets quality standards (see Recommendation 3.2.1). This will ensure that all new graduates of initial teacher education programmes have obtained practical teaching experience before entering the classroom.

In addition, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should review and revise criteria that are used to inform initial placement decisions to ensure that they are objective and allow decision-makers to meaningfully assess the competencies of newly certified recent graduates. For example, candidates' performance during their practicum placement, as evidenced by assessments or references, could be taken into account. Research indicates that this is a better predictor of actual performance in the classroom than the results of a multiple-choice test (OECD, 2010[35]). To create greater efficiency, Albania might consider re-visiting the requirement that candidates pass both the state exam and the Teachers for Albania employment test in order to be eligible for their first teaching job. While the tests are used for different purposes and the Teachers for Albania test contains questions on a broader range of topics, they cover some of the same content areas (i.e. subject knowledge, pedagogy), and graduates often complete them in succession. A number of countries use an exam for both teacher certification and placement in schools, including France, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Turkey (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]).

Recommendation 3.2.5. Manage admission to initial teacher education programmes to attract talented candidates and anticipate demand from the school system

Entry requirements and quotas for initial teacher education programmes can help countries select the best candidates for the teaching profession and ensure that an appropriate number are trained. Albania has taken steps to improve the calibre of teacher candidates by raising the bar for entry to bachelor's degree programmes that prepare future primary teachers. However, the country has not introduced a minimum requirement for entry to the master's degree programmes that prepare future secondary teachers. In addition, the government has not adjusted admission quotas to initial teacher education programmes based on the demand for teachers. This means that, while there are shortages for some subjects, such as mathematics and science, there is an oversupply of teachers in others. To address these gaps, Albania should consider tightening entry requirements and adjusting the spaces allotted to initial teacher education programmes.

Consider revising the entry requirements for consecutive initial teacher education programmes

Each provider of graduate initial teacher education programmes in Albania sets their own admission standards, which usually take into account students' grades and the demand for the programme. The bar for entry could vary significantly across programmes. There are indications that it is relatively low compared to other professions. The grade point averages

of applicants to initial teacher education programmes leading to a master's degree have tended to be lower than those for other graduate programmes (MoESY, 2014[13]).

The ministry should work with initial teacher education programme providers to set minimum requirements for entry into the master's degree programmes. In addition to grade point averages, providers could assess other factors important to teaching. For example, providers in countries with strong education systems tend to assess applicants' interpersonal and communication skills, willingness to learn and motivation to teach (Barber and Mourshed, 2007[4]). These can be assessed through interviews or exams specifically intended for admission to initial teacher education programmes, which are used in roughly a third of European countries (Eurydice, 2013[47]). Given the declining student population in Albania, programmes that prepare teachers for all levels – primary and secondary – could use these measures to be more selective, while keeping in mind the need to monitor subject-specific demand.

Conduct forward planning exercises to inform entry requirements and quotas

In Albania, any new bar for entry into initial teacher education programmes should be informed by an analysis of the needs of the education system. This analysis will also reveal what adjustments to admission quotas are necessary. Quotas have not been adjusted for some time despite an oversupply of teachers for certain subjects. Specifically, the ministry should work with initial teacher education programme providers to:

- **Conduct systematic forward planning based on reliable data.** Albania reportedly already collects a range of data on teacher vacancies and conducts some form of forward planning to forecast future demand (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]). The ministry should review and refine its forecasting model and labour market data in order to conduct systematic projections of teacher supply and demand that can be used to inform adjustments to initial teacher education programme entry requirements and quotas. For example, the ministry should further develop Socrates, the education management information system, to collect country-wide data more efficiently and better ensure its reliability (see Chapter 5). Albania could look to many European countries for examples of forecasting models that inform adjustments to the supply of teachers. Scotland (United Kingdom) adjusts admission quotas to initial teacher education programmes on an annual basis while projecting teacher supply and demand over five years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018[16]).
- **Publish information about the teacher employment landscape and forecasts** to allow students to make informed decisions about whether to enter initial teacher education programmes. This information will be particularly useful for students who are considering obtaining qualifications to teach subjects for which few vacant teaching positions are available.

Recommendation 3.2.6. Incentivise teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas and provide them with more supports to be effective

Albania is experiencing a shortage of teachers in certain rural and remote regions. New teachers are more likely to find employment opportunities in these hard-to-staff areas than in urban schools that are not experiencing shortages. Albania should provide supports to help these new teachers and their experienced colleagues be effective in addressing the challenges rural and remote schools face. At the same time, Albania should consider introducing incentives to attract talented new and experienced teachers to these schools.

Provide sufficient preparation and support to teachers in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas

In Albania, teachers receive very little to no initial preparation in areas like managing multi-grade classes, which are common in rural schools. Teachers in these schools are also more likely to experience challenges like a shortage of education material (OECD, 2016[48]). The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should provide better preparation and support to teachers to be effective in rural or socio-economically disadvantaged areas, including:

- **Providing practical initial teacher preparation for rural and remote contexts.** Initial teacher education curriculum and practice teaching opportunities should prepare teacher candidates for the contexts in which they are likely to teach. For example, curriculum content should cover working with students from a range of social and economic backgrounds. Research indicates that teacher candidates who have practice teaching experiences in disadvantaged schools are able to perform better as teachers (OECD, 2012[49]).
- **Strengthening mentorship during the induction programme**. Mentoring can improve retention and more quickly develop the effectiveness of novice teachers in hard-to-staff schools (OECD, 2012[49]). Mentors can help novice teachers understand and develop strategies to address the challenges their school and students face. In better preparing and supporting mentors (see Recommendation 3.2.2), Albania should provide specific guidance to mentors in hard-to-staff schools.
- **Providing relevant training modules**. Albania should ensure that continuous professional development opportunities are available to teachers that address some of the specific issues of teaching in rural and remote areas, such as multi-grade classes.
- **Expanding networking to overcome isolation.** Albania has reportedly created networks to connect rural teachers with their counterparts in urban schools as a supportive measure. This is an important initiative that the Quality Assurance Agency should expand to counter isolation among teachers in rural areas.

Incentivise talented and motivated teachers to work in harder-to-staff areas

Countries commonly use financial and career incentives to attract teachers to remote and rural schools (OECD, 2005[50]). In Albania, the ministry should consider:

- **Introducing previously proposed incentives to attract teachers**. In 2015-16, Albania developed a plan to provide incentives (e.g. allowances for rent and transportation, free continuous professional development courses, and priority in transferring to their next teaching position) to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools (UNESCO, 2017[17]). The ministry should proceed with piloting these incentives and evaluating their impact.

- **Creating initial teacher education scholarships**. The ministry could provide scholarships to students from harder-to-staff areas of the country who commit to teaching in their home area for a certain period of time. For example, China's Free Teacher Education Policy offers high-performing students from lower income, rural regions of the country free university tuition and ten years of job security if they agree to work as teachers in their home area for at least two years (UNESCO, 2014[51]).
- **Introducing a career fast-track for teachers in rural or remote areas.** Many OECD countries use career fast-tracks to incentivise talented teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas. Queensland (Australia) provides teachers with financial and professional development benefits when working in remote and rural areas, including being able to fast-track their leadership careers (Department of Education, 2019[52]). Similarly, Albania could make teachers who choose to teach for a minimum number of years in rural or remote areas eligible for a career fast-track. For example, these teachers could be given additional bonus points in the appraisal for promotion process.

Policy issue 3.3. Ensuring that regular appraisal informs teachers' professional development

In Albania, principals or deputy principals appraise teachers' performance on an annual basis. They also regularly conduct classroom observations and review teachers' lesson plans. However, these activities are undertaken primarily to fulfil administrative responsibilities rather than to help teachers further develop their teaching competencies (Duda, Golubeva and Clifford-Amos, 2013[30]). For example, classroom observations and lesson plan reviews do not consistently result in feedback to teachers on how they can improve their practices. Albania should re-orient these activities so that they support teachers' development and incorporate them into a regular appraisal process that is explicitly formative. This formative appraisal process should help teachers better identify their training needs, encourage teachers to set goals for their development and participate in professional learning activities to meet those goals. In addition to modifying the elements of the appraisal process, Albania should develop resources and training to help appraisers and teachers conduct it effectively.

Recommendation 3.3.1. Make the regular appraisal process developmental

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should change the evidence that is used for the regular appraisal of teachers to ensure that it allows principals to meaningfully assess authentic teaching and learning practices. At present, teachers' annual plans and portfolios do not provide this information. Authentic sources of evidence would, instead, include classroom observations and a portfolio that contains documentation of teachers' practices. To encourage teachers' professional growth, the regular appraisal should also involve the creation of an individual development plan. Most importantly, Albania should provide guidance and tools to schools to ensure that the appraisal leads to constructive feedback and teachers' participation in professional learning activities. This will support teachers' development, including their development of student-centred teaching practices.

Use the revised teaching standards to appraise teachers' performance

Use of the revised teaching standards will be instrumental to making the regular appraisal process more formative. Albania should ensure that teachers use the standards to help inform their goals for development. Appraisers should use them to make consistent judgements about teachers' performance when reviewing evidence of their work. In so doing, appraisers should assess teachers against the competency levels connected to their particular career stage. The standards should also help appraisers identify areas where growth is needed, leading to constructive feedback and advice about professional development opportunities that would address teachers' needs.

Develop tools to help schools use classroom observations for formative feedback

Principals in Albania are required to conduct classroom observations three hours per week (MoESY, 2014[13]). However, the former State Inspectorate of Education (see Chapter 1) has found that observations are not consistently conducted to check on improvements to teaching practices (AQAPUE, 2017[53]). Classroom observations should be viewed as an integral part of a regular formative appraisal process. Their main purpose should be to provide feedback to teachers on their strengths and weaknesses, particularly in relation to their use of student-centred teaching practices (e.g. evidence of formative assessment). The Quality Assurance Agency should develop standard classroom observation tools to support this, such as:

- **An indicators and descriptors tool** that helps appraisers and teachers understand what to look for when making judgements about whether a teacher is demonstrating competencies related to the teaching standards. This could be similar to the indicators and descriptors developed by the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching (ICALT). For example, in the ICALT, one indicator is "the teacher promotes the mutual respect and interest of students" and one of the descriptors of how this is effectively demonstrated is "the teacher encourages children to listen to each other" (OECD, 2013[1]). This review recommends that the Quality Assurance Agency also use the ICALT to develop a tool to support inspectors' classroom observations (see Chapter 4).
- **A standard template** that identifies each competency/indicator and provides space for principals to indicate the extent to which the teacher has demonstrated it, using a common scale, and to provide written comments and feedback.

Replace the annual plan with an individual development plan

The annual plan that is used to appraise teachers in Albania does not encourage teacher development. It is used to record student test scores and a range of administrative information, such as teacher training credits and absences. To focus regular appraisal on teachers' development, Albania should replace the annual plan with an individual development plan. Specifically, Albania should:

- **Use an individual development plan for self-appraisal and goal setting**. In the plan, teachers should identify specific goals for improvement, professional development and student learning and describe how they would work towards them. In developing these goals, teachers would be expected to reflect on their most recent appraisal results, the revised teaching standards and objectives in the school development plan.

- **Provide a template and guidance on developing goals**. The Quality Assurance Agency should provide schools with a simple individual development plan template and guidance on how to set goals. For example, the agency could also advise teachers to work with their principals (and subject teams) to identify specific student learning goals and how they will assess students' progress towards them. These goals might relate to the development of cross-curricular competencies and the use of methods like student portfolios to assess them. Teachers could provide evidence of students' progress in their own teaching portfolios (see below). This would provide a more meaningful measure of teachers' contributions to students' learning than their raw marks alone. To support student-centred teaching, the Quality Assurance Agency could encourage teachers to specify learning goals for struggling students and goals related to the use of formative assessment (see Chapter 2).
- **Make the plan the focus of dialogue with the principal.** Teachers would be expected to obtain their principals' approval on their goals at the outset. The plan would serve as the focus of professional dialogue between the teacher and the principal at the beginning and end of the appraisal cycle. These discussions, a recommended practice in the research literature, are already built into the regular appraisal process in Albania (OECD, 2013[1]). However, the Quality Assurance Agency should also provide advice to schools about how to structure them.

Revise the teacher portfolio to provide evidence of teaching practices in relation to the revised teaching standards

A teacher portfolio review should be another key element of a formative regular appraisal process in Albania. At the moment, the portfolio teachers are required to maintain contains only administrative material. The portfolio should, instead, contain evidence of teachers' practice that demonstrates their work towards or achievement of competencies in the revised teaching standards. This would encourage teachers' self-reflection and help to focus teachers' and principals' conversations on professional development needs. This type of portfolio would also support teachers' career advancement. Specifically, it would help appraisers and teachers determine whether they are working at the competency level for their career stage. Teachers could also draw documents from this portfolio for the appraisal for promotion process.

Albania should ensure that the review of the portfolio and other teaching material results in feedback to teachers. Principals in Albania are currently required to review teachers' documentation (e.g. lessons plans) on a regular basis, but this process does not systematically lead to feedback, even when problems are identified (AQAPUE, 2017[53]). Without this step, the review of documentation is simply an administrative check that adds to the workload of principals. The Quality Assurance Agency should advise principals and teachers to devote sufficient time to discussion of the portfolio and other teaching material and provide guidance on how to provide constructive feedback (see below).

Ensure that regular appraisal is connected to participation in continuous professional development

During school visits, the review team heard that teachers never discuss their professional development needs with their principal as part of the regular appraisal process. This is problematic because appraisal must have a strong connection to professional development in order to have a positive impact on teaching and learning (OECD, 2013[1]).

To support teachers' professional growth, Albania should train principals on how to help teachers identify and address their learning needs in their individual development plans (see Recommendation 3.3.2). Albania should also consider:

- **Helping teachers and principals easily identify relevant professional development.** As recommended in Policy issue 3.1, the Quality Assurance Agency should categorise continuous professional development according to the revised teaching standards to which they relate. The Quality Assurance Agency should also provide schools with templates for teacher-principal appraisal meetings that prompt discussions on professional development. Over time, the agency might also consider investing in tools that automatically suggest possible professional learning opportunities based on the results of a teacher's appraisal. One example of this is the iObservation tool, developed by Learning Sciences International, a firm based in the United States, which directly links appraisal scores with professional development resources such as books or curriculum materials (Goe, Biggers and Croft, 2012[8]).
- **Requiring teachers to address significant competency gaps.** The ministry should give principals the authority to require teachers who are clearly underperforming in important competency areas to participate in mandatory training. This is important to ensure that all teachers in Albania are meeting minimum requirements. In Chile, for example, teachers who obtain a "basic" or "poor" rating on their appraisal are required to create and follow a professional development plan to improve their competencies (Santiago et al., 2013[2]). This type of training should be free of charge so that teachers in all schools, whether in socio-economically advantaged or disadvantaged areas, can access it.
- **Providing principals with guidance on how to avoid conflicts of interest when advising teachers.** In Albania, an administrative instruction prohibits principals from influencing school staff in selecting a training agency. This seems intended to eliminate conflicts of interest by preventing principals from recommending modules offered by providers with whom they have some connection (e.g. as a trainer). However, principals may interpret this as a barrier to providing any guidance on professional development to teachers in their school. To ensure that principals can support teachers' professional learning, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency could modify the wording in the administrative instruction to clarify what specifically constitutes a conflict of interest. Any new training for principals should include advice on how to avoid such conflicts of interest.

Recommendation 3.3.2. Provide more guidance to teachers and school principals on how to undertake a formative appraisal

The use of the teaching standards and appraisal templates in the regular appraisal process varies across Albania. The Quality Assurance Agency is currently developing guidelines to improve consistency in the implementation of the regular appraisal process and to encourage use of the teaching standards. It will also be important for principals to receive training on the key components of the regular appraisal process that encourage teachers' development.

Issue guidelines and tools that provide essential information and advice to teachers and appraisers

While schools in Albania should have some flexibility to implement regular teacher appraisal in ways that best address their needs, they also need clear direction on how to conduct it effectively. This is especially important given that appraisers and teachers in Albania do not have experience undertaking an appraisal process that is focused on development. The Quality Assurance Agency should:

- **Issue practical guidelines about how to conduct a regular appraisal process that supports professional growth.** Guidelines should communicate the formative purpose of regular appraisal and outline each step in the regular appraisal process. They should also provide guidance on how to conduct major elements of the appraisal process, such as classroom observations and structured discussions between the appraiser and the teacher. Finally, they should explain how the regular appraisal of teachers relates to other appraisal processes, such as appraisal for promotion.
- **Provide easily accessible appraisal tools and videos**. The Quality Assurance Agency should create appraisal resources and make them available online as part of their website. Resources should help principals make judgements about teachers' performance and help teachers reflect on their own practices and set goals. For example, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's website provides a range of resources related to performance and development (AITSL, 2017[54]). Videos show how teachers' practices at different stages of their careers demonstrate the teaching standards. Other tools include performance and development case studies, such as a video of how one school conducts classroom observations and provides feedback to teachers, and PowerPoint presentation workshops on key elements of the appraisal cycle.

Provide training and supports to school principals

Albania has plans to introduce pre-service and in-service training for principals and deputy principals (see Chapter 4). They currently receive no training on how to conduct regular appraisals, although the review team heard that some training has been offered in the past. The Quality Assurance Agency could work with the School of Directors to develop training and support for in-service principals on the regular appraisal process. This type of training is now offered in a number of OECD and European countries, including the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic (OECD, 2015[55]; Santiago et al., 2012[56]). One area that should be addressed is conducting effective classroom observations. Appraisal processes that involve classroom observations are associated with higher student outcomes, but appraisers need appropriate guidance and instruments in order to conduct them effectively (OECD, 2013[57]).

Principals in Albania should also receive preparation and resources on how to provide constructive feedback to teachers. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency could develop an appraisal feedback template to help principals provide written feedback to teachers on their appraisal results. This should prompt principals to identify strengths and areas where further development is needed, as well as suggestions for methods to improve. This qualitative feedback is important for formative purposes and can also be used as input into decisions about a teacher's promotion (see Policy issue 3.1).

Policy issue 3.4. Strengthening the collaborative professional learning activities that have the greatest impact on teachers' practices

Collaborative, job-embedded learning is the most effective at improving teachers' competence (Schleicher, 2011[58]). Albania has created the structures to provide teachers with this type of learning in the form of school subject teams and, beyond the school, the professional learning networks. However, these groups need significant support to provide high-quality learning opportunities to teachers. Albania has not yet invested in developing their capacity. Notably, school subject teams receive no resources or guidance to support their activities.

Teachers' continuous professional development in Albania is underfunded, in general. This lack of funding was reportedly one reason behind the ministry's establishment of the professional learning networks and a related reliance on the train-the-trainer model to deliver training. Albania should strengthen both the professional learning networks and school subject teams by providing training, guidance and funding to support teachers' collaborative learning. Both groups should help teachers shift their teaching practices towards more student-centred approaches. Albania should also ensure that the Quality Assurance Agency has sufficient resources to provide an adequate amount of training to teachers on education priorities and that schools receive funds to train their staff.

Recommendation 3.4.1. Strengthen professional learning at the local and school level

To better support teachers' collaborative learning, Albania should strengthen the professional learning networks to serve as a primary resource for school subject teams. This will encourage teachers' job-embedded learning by helping them put what they are learning in their networks into practice in their schools. For example, the topics dealt with in the networks should help to guide and focus the work of the subject teams. Albania should also make changes to the subject teams to ensure that they can engage teachers in meaningful learning activities in the school. Finally, Albania should further invest in e-learning opportunities as an additional forum for teachers' collaborative professional development.

Strengthen professional learning networks and ensure continuity with in-school learning

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should strengthen the professional learning networks to support the work of the school subject teams. In the immediate term, this would involve:

- **Reviewing and revising training for professional network managers**. At the moment, training for professional network managers focuses mostly on curriculum content rather than how to effectively co-ordinate a peer-learning network. The Quality Assurance Agency should ensure that this training also prepares them to help teachers understand how they can incorporate new practices into their everyday teaching by connecting theory and practice (Timperley, 2008[59]).
- **Providing sufficient resources**. This could include digital material (PowerPoint presentations, factsheets, videos) housed on the Quality Assurance Agency website describing the practices of professional learning communities that are associated with improving student outcomes (e.g. reflective discussions on teaching practices, coaching to challenge assumptions and encourage learning) (OECD, 2005[50]). These resources should also be applicable to and used by school subject teams.

- **Linking the work of the networks and the school subject teams.** For example, the Quality Assurance Agency could define topics (e.g. major curriculum changes and related teaching strategies) that could be the subject of meetings of both the professional learning networks and school subject teams, and task the latter with conducting related active learning activities in schools. Active learning activities would include things such as meeting to conduct joint work, trying out and observing teaching strategies in the classroom and providing feedback. Results of this work could be shared with the professional learning networks.

Support subject teams to become effective professional learning communities

Support from government at the central and local levels is crucial to the success of schools' efforts to build collaborative learning cultures. They have a key role to play in encouraging meaningful professional development, promoting networking, and disseminating good practices (Kools and Stoll, 2016[60]). To support the work of the subject teams, the ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should consider:

- **Clarifying the professional learning responsibilities of subject teams.** The ministry should revise the Normative Provisions to clearly define teachers' professional learning as a primary purpose of the school subject teams and to include active learning activities such as classroom observations among their responsibilities.
- **Carefully selecting and recognising subject team heads.** Currently, there are minimal selection criteria for subject team heads and they have few defined responsibilities. In developing a new teacher career structure, the ministry should more clearly define the responsibilities of subject team heads and the inter-personal and professional competencies needed to take on this role (see Policy issue 3.1). Subject team heads should also be remunerated for their role, either through a reduced workload or a salary allowance.
- **Preparing subject team heads for their role**. The Quality Assurance Agency should develop training for subject team heads to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the pre-tertiary curriculum and can effectively lead professional learning communities. This training could, for example, cover how to conduct effective collaborative dialogue, joint work and classroom observations and coach and provide feedback to other teachers. It could be delivered by the Quality Assurance Agency staff or staff within the local education offices. These individuals might also provide coaching to subject team heads on an ongoing basis. In Lithuania for example, the central Education Development Centre prepared a network of expert teachers, called educational consultants, to develop teachers in fifteen national priority areas (Shewbridge et al., 2016[61]).

- **Helping subject teams use appraisal results to target development needs.** School subject teams use an annual questionnaire to identify their members' development needs for the school development plan. This method has disadvantages as it relies solely on teachers self-reporting their needs. The ministry might consider introducing a process whereby schools also use regular appraisal results to identify teachers' learning needs for school development planning. For example, in Korea, each school has an appraisal management committee that reviews teachers' appraisal results at an aggregate level (no individual teachers are identified) and their professional development plans to draft a school-wide report on staff learning needs for submission to the principal (Kim et al., 2010[62]). In Albania, this type of activity could help subject teams target areas of weakness for teachers and inform the school development plan.
- **Helping principals to support the work of the subject teams.** Albania's new School of Directors is working to professionalise the principal role (see Chapter 4). This should include positioning the building of a collaborative work culture as one of the core responsibilities of effective school leadership (Schleicher, 2012[18]). As part of this, the ministry and School of Directors should specify how principals should support the work of school subject teams. For example, the ministry should provide guidance to principals about how they should timetable to ensure that teachers have sufficient opportunities to meet in their subject teams and conduct active learning activities such as classroom observations.

Further develop e-learning opportunities

E-learning platforms allow teachers to access tools and collaborate with each other in ways that are responsive to their needs (Schleicher, 2016[63]). Most OECD countries and many emerging economies have developed them to support teachers' professional learning. In Albania, the Quality Assurance Agency should further invest in developing these types of e-learning platforms. Notably, the Quality Assurance Agency should build on its existing pre-tertiary curriculum platform to provide digital resources to teachers, including model student assessments and lesson plans (see Chapter 2). In developing this feature of the platform, the Quality Assurance Agency will need to consider what quality assurance checks will be necessary to ensure that the material shared on the platform meets minimum requirements. The Quality Assurance Agency could, for example, look to the peer-review process undertaken in Moscow (Russian Federation), whereby experienced teachers review and provide comments on each other's uploaded material (Mos.ru, 2016[64]; Medium, 2017[65]).

Recommendation 3.4.2. Devote sufficient resources to teachers' continuous professional development

The continuous professional development of teachers in Albania is underfunded (European Commission, 2017[28]). The Quality Assurance Agency's predecessor, the Education Development Institute, lacked the resources to deliver more than one day of training per year on priority areas. Schools are also not provided with any discretionary financial resources for staff training. This limits their capacity to help teachers improve their practices. The ministry will need to increase funding for continuous professional development to ensure that teachers are provided with thorough and sustained training in priority areas and give schools the means to address the professional learning needs of their staff.

Provide the necessary funding for training on priority areas

Given Albania's education reform efforts and the need to develop teachers' student-centred practices, the Quality Assurance Agency needs to be able to deliver quality training to teachers. A lack of funding will prevent the agency from effectively developing and delivering the continuous professional development, resources and tools recommended in this chapter. The government will need to provide sufficient resources to the Quality Assurance Agency to fulfil its mandate, as well as to regional directorates and local education offices which have been recently re-organised to provide more support to schools (see Chapter 4). In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency should review the individual cost of participating in professional development for teachers to ensure that it is affordable.

Provide funding to schools for teachers' continuous professional development

Schools in Albania are required to identify the continuous professional development needs of their staff in their annual school development plans, but they do not receive any funding to address those needs, and they are underfunded in general. In the *Strategy on pre-university education development, 2014-2020*, the ministry proposed giving schools autonomy to use government funds to meet staff training objectives in their development plans. The ministry should proceed with implementing this proposal. Specifically, as recommended in Chapter 4, the ministry should provide earmarked funding to Albania's schools which can be used, at their discretion, for continuous professional development that meets teachers' needs. Other countries that make use of this type of funding include Estonia, where 1% of the state budget for teachers' salaries is provided to schools for their staff development needs, and Singapore, where each school has a continuous professional development fund (Kools and Stoll, 2016[60]; Santiago, 2016[66]).

Table of recommendations

Policy issue	Recommendations	Actions
3.1. Encouraging teachers to improve their competencies throughout their career	3.1.1. Create a teacher career structure that encourages teachers to develop higher competency levels	Consider developing a two-track career structure
		Establish roles and responsibilities for the stages of the career structure
		Revise the professional teaching standards to define competencies associated with different levels in the teacher career structure
		Consult with teachers on revisions to the teaching standards
		Offer professional learning opportunities that allow teachers to develop competencies for career advancement
	3.1.2. Revise the appraisal for promotion process to ensure teachers' readiness to take on new roles and responsibilities	Draw on multiple sources of evidence to authentically assess teachers' competencies and motivation
		Create a new cadre of external evaluators to undertake appraisal for promotion
		Establish a national committee to oversee appraisal for promotion
		Provide guidelines and tools to support the work of external appraisers
		Make clear any additional requirements for teacher roles
	3.1.3. Plan carefully for the implementation of the revised career structure	Establish a salary scale that supports the revised career structure
		Create a plan to place teachers in the revised career structure
		Consider introducing a higher career level to incentivise the most experienced teachers

3.2. Improving the initial preparation and selection of teachers	3.2.1. Ensure that initial teacher education programmes develop the competencies novice teachers need at the start of their careers	Use the teaching standards for novice teachers to inform the contents and accreditation of initial teacher education programmes
		Ensure teacher candidates have sufficient practice teaching opportunities
	3.2.2: Convert the internship into an induction programme for newly employed teachers	Create an induction period to support novice teachers in their learning
		Prepare mentors and support them in their role
	3.2.3. Modify the internship appraisal into a probation appraisal and an appraisal for registration that are based on evidence of teaching and learning practices	Make the principal responsible for an induction/probation appraisal
		Base the induction/probation appraisal on evidence of teaching and learning practices
		Replace the external component of the internship appraisal with an appraisal for registration
	3.2.4. Revise requirements for initial certification and placement to assess the competencies of new graduates	Revise the state exam for teacher certification
		Review the criteria used to certify and place new teachers
	3.2.5. Manage admission to initial teacher education programmes to attract talented candidates and anticipate demand from the school system	Consider revising the entry requirements for consecutive initial teacher education programmes
		Conduct forward planning exercises to inform entry requirements and quotas
	3.2.6. Incentivise teachers to work in hard-to-staff areas and provide them with more supports to be effective	Provide sufficient preparation and support to teachers in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas
		Incentivise talented and motivated teachers to work in harder-to-staff areas
3.3. Ensuring that regular appraisal informs teachers' professional development	3.3.1. Make the regular appraisal process developmental	Use the revised teaching standards to appraise teachers' performance
		Develop tools to help schools use classroom observations for formative feedback
		Replace the annual plan with an individual development plan
		Revise the teacher portfolio to provide evidence of teaching practices in relation to the revised teaching standards
		Ensure that regular appraisal is connected to participation in continuous professional development
	3.3.2. Provide more guidance to teachers and school principals on how to undertake a formative appraisal	Issue guidelines and tools that provide essential information and advice to teachers and appraisers
		Provide training and supports to school principals
3.4. Strengthening the collaborative professional learning activities that have the greatest impact on teachers' practices	3.4.1. Strengthen professional learning at the local and school level	Strengthen professional learning networks and ensure continuity with in-school learning
		Support subject teams to become effective professional learning communities
		Further develop e-learning opportunities
	3.4.2. Devote sufficient resources to teachers' continuous professional development	Provide the necessary funding for training on priority areas
		Provide funding to schools for teachers' continuous professional development

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Chapter 4. Supporting school evaluation for improvement

This chapter looks at how Albania can make better use of school evaluation to improve teaching and learning practices. Albania has central procedures for conducting external school evaluations, but very few have been undertaken in recent years. A recent re-organisation of the country's school evaluation system aims to increase capacity to conduct evaluations and also provide more support to schools. However, some changes may compromise the quality of evaluations. These include the spreading of responsibility for external school evaluations across multiple bodies. In addition, ongoing systemic challenges in Albania limit schools' ability to meaningfully respond to external evaluations and their annual self-evaluations. In particular, schools are underfunded and have minimal to no autonomy to make budgetary decisions. Schools are also hindered by a lack of strong school leadership. Albania is addressing this challenge through the establishment of a new School of Directors to train and certify principals. Albania also needs to consolidate responsibility for external school evaluation and provide greater technical and financial support to schools to act upon external and internal evaluation findings.

Introduction

A decade ago, Albania established a central independent school inspectorate, the State Inspectorate of Education (hereby, the inspectorate) to conduct external school evaluations and introduced the requirement that schools conduct annual self-evaluations. However, very few external school evaluations were conducted because the inspectorate was under-resourced. Albania re-organised its school evaluation system in 2019. The country merged the inspectorate with another central agency and decentralised responsibility for conducting external school evaluations to new regional directorates. The intent of these changes was to enhance capacity to conduct external evaluations and better support schools to improve. However, spreading responsibility for external school evaluation across multiple bodies is unlikely to improve the quality and integrity of evaluations. New regional evaluators will likely be tasked with supporting the schools they have evaluated, which may compromise the objectivity of the evaluation process.

Furthermore, Albania has not yet addressed systemic challenges that limit schools' capacity to respond to findings from both external evaluations and their own self-evaluations. These include the underfunding of schools and funding disparities that perpetuate inequities. Schools also continue to lack strong leadership and guidance to conduct effective self-evaluation methods and act upon results.

Albania will need to make further changes to strengthen school evaluation and help schools improve their practices. As a priority, Albania should consolidate responsibility for external school evaluation within one central body and provide technical supports and financial resources to schools to help them act upon external evaluation findings. Albania will also need to build schools' capacity to improve by providing training and tools on self-evaluation and, through the new School of Directors, developing principals' instructional leadership.

Key features of an effective school evaluation system

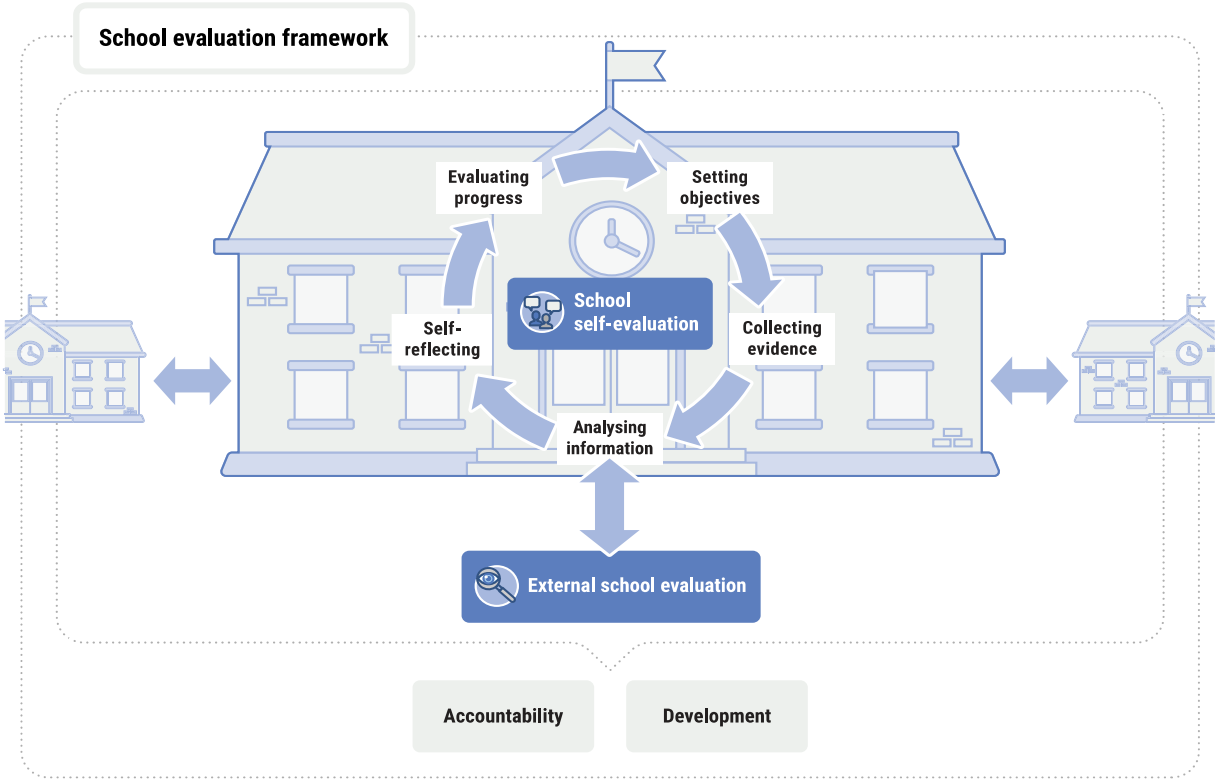
In most OECD countries, school evaluations ensure compliance with rules and procedures, and focus increasingly on school quality and improvement (see Figure 4.1). Another recent trend has been the development of school self-evaluation, which has become a central mechanism for encouraging school-led improvement and objective setting. Strengthened systems for external and school-level monitoring and evaluation are seen as essential complements to the increasing decentralisation of education systems internationally to ensure local and school accountability for education quality.

Frameworks for school evaluation ensure transparency, consistency and focus on key aspects of the school environment

Frameworks for school evaluation should align with the broader aims of an education system. They should ensure that schools create an environment where all students can thrive and achieve national learning standards. As well as ensuring compliance with rules and procedures, effective frameworks focus on the aspects of the school environment that are most important for students' learning and development. These include the quality of teaching and learning, support for teachers' development, and the quality of instructional leadership (OECD, 2013[1]). Most frameworks also use a measure of students' educational outcomes and progress according to national learning standards, such as assessments results or teachers' reports. A number of OECD countries have developed a national vision of a good school (OECD, 2013[1]). The vision guides evaluation, helping to focus on the

ultimate purpose of ensuring that every school is good. Visions are often framed around learners, setting out how a good school supports their intellectual, emotional and social development.

Figure 4.1. School evaluation



Countries' external evaluations balance accountability and improvement

The vast majority of OECD countries have external school evaluations (see Figure 4.2). Schools tend to be evaluated on a cyclical basis, most commonly every three to five years. (OECD, 2015[2]). Within the broad purpose of evaluating school performance, some countries emphasise accountability for teaching quality and learning outcomes. In these countries, national assessment data, school ratings and the publication of evaluation reports play an important role. In contrast, in countries that place greater emphasis on improvement, evaluations tend to focus more on support and feedback to schools. They also place a strong emphasis on helping schools develop their own internal evaluation and improvement processes.

Evaluations aim to establish a school-wide perspective on teaching and learning

Administrative information for compliance reporting is a standard source of information for evaluations, although it is now collected digitally in most countries (OECD, 2015[2]). This frees up time during school visits to collect evidence of school quality. Most evaluations are based on a school visit over multiple days. Visits frequently include classroom observations. Unlike for teacher appraisal, these observations do not evaluate individual teachers but rather aim to cover a sample of classes across different subjects and grades to establish a view of teaching and learning across the school. Inspectors also

undertake interviews with school staff, students and sometimes collect the views of parents. Since much of this information is qualitative and subjective, making it difficult to evaluate reliably, countries develop significant guidance such as rubrics for classroom observations to ensure fairness and consistency.

Many countries have created school inspectorates in central government

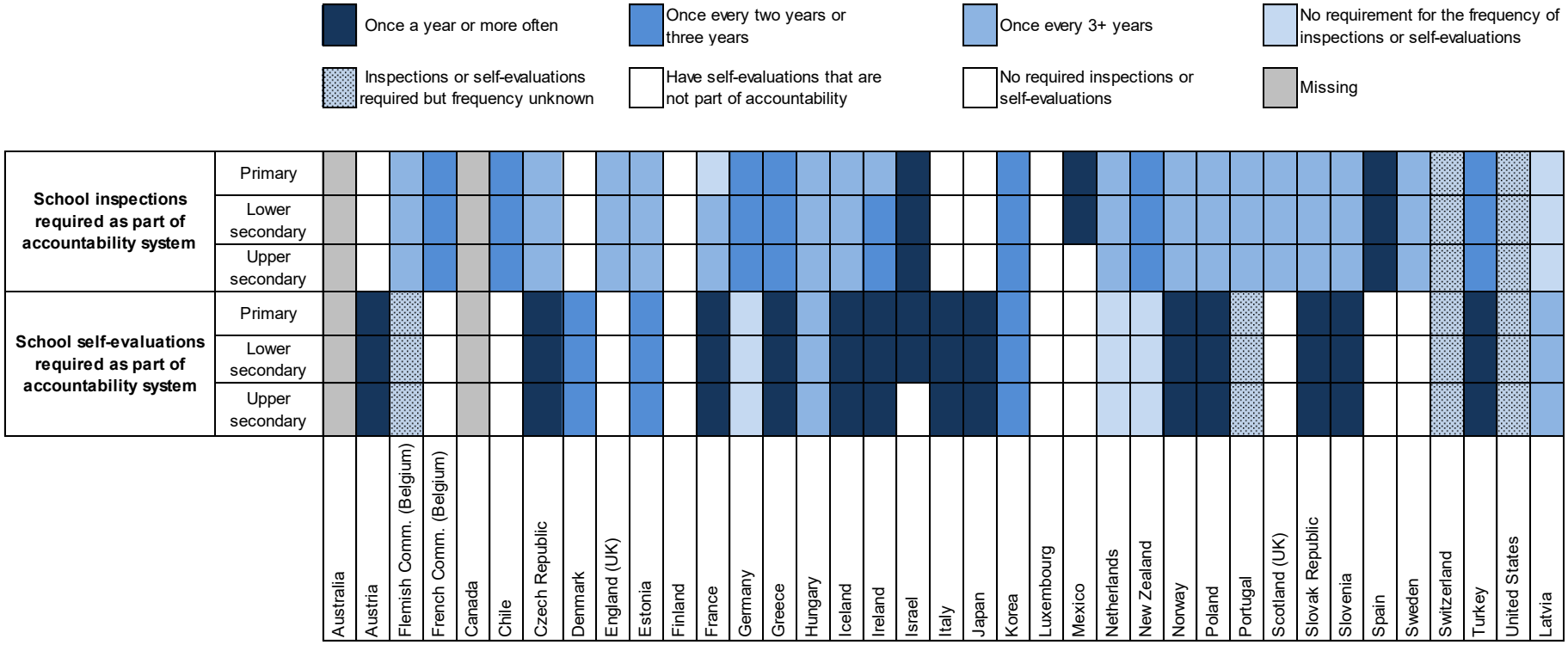
External evaluations are led by national education authorities, frequently from central government (OECD, 2013[1]). Across Europe, most countries have created an inspectorate that is affiliated to but frequently independent of government. This arrangement ensures integrity and enables inspectorates to develop the significant professional expertise necessary for effective evaluation. School inspectors may be permanent staff or accredited experts contracted to undertake evaluations. The latter provides flexibility for countries, enabling them to meet the schedule of school evaluations and draw on a range of experience, without the costs of maintaining a large permanent staff. Inspectors across OECD countries are generally expected to have significant experience in the teaching profession.

The consequences of evaluations vary according to their purpose

To serve improvement purposes, evaluations must provide schools with clear, specific feedback in the school evaluation report, which helps them understand what is good in the school and what they can do to improve. To follow up and ensure that recommendations are implemented, countries often require schools to use evaluation results in their development plans. In some countries, local authorities also support evaluation follow-up and school improvement. Around half of OECD countries use evaluation results to target low-performing schools for more frequent evaluations (OECD, 2015[2]).

In most countries, evaluations also result in a rating that highlights excellent, satisfactory or underperforming schools. To support accountability, most OECD countries publish evaluation reports (OECD, 2015[2]). Public evaluation reports can generate healthy competition between schools and are an important source of information for students and parents in systems with school choice. However, publishing reports also risks distorting school-level practices such as encouraging an excessive focus on assessment results or preparation for evaluations. Evaluation frameworks must therefore emphasise the quality of school-level processes, and an inclusive vision of learning, where all students, regardless of ability or background, are supported to do their best. Evaluation systems that emphasise decontextualised outcome data such as assessment results are likely to unfairly penalise schools where students come from less advantaged backgrounds since socio-economic background is the most influential factor associated with educational outcomes (OECD, 2016[3]).

Figure 4.2. School evaluation in OECD countries



Source: OECD (2015[2]), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en;

Self-evaluation is an internal tool for improvement

Most OECD countries require schools to undertake self-evaluations annually or every two years (see Figure 4.2). Self-evaluations encourage self-reflection, goal-setting and inform school development plans (OECD, 2013[1]). To be an effective source of school-led improvement, many countries encourage schools to use appropriate self-evaluation as an internal tool for improvement rather than an externally imposed requirement. In some countries, schools develop their own frameworks for self-evaluation. In others, they use a common framework with external evaluation but have the discretion to add or adapt indicators to reflect their context and priorities.

The relationship between external and internal evaluations varies across countries. In general, as systems mature, greater emphasis is placed on self-evaluation while external evaluation is scaled back. Most OECD countries now use the results from self-evaluations to feed external evaluations, with, for example, inspectors reviewing self-evaluation results as part of external evaluations. However, the relationship is also shaped by the degree of school autonomy – in centralised systems, external evaluations continue to have a more dominant role, while the reverse is true for systems that emphasise greater school autonomy.

Effective self-evaluation requires strong school-level capacity

Effective self-evaluation requires strong leadership and strong processes for monitoring, evaluating and setting objectives (SICI, 2003[4]). Many OECD countries highlight that developing this capacity in schools is a challenge. This makes specific training for principals and teachers in self-evaluation – using evaluation results, classroom and peer observations, analysis of data and developing improvement plans – important (OECD, 2013[1]). Other supports include guidelines on undertaking self-evaluations and suggested indicators for self-evaluations.

While a principal's leadership plays a critical role in self-evaluation, creating teams to share self-evaluation roles is also important. The most effective self-evaluation teams involve a range of staff that are respected by their colleagues and have a clear vision of how self-evaluation can support school improvement (MacBeath, 2008[5]). To support collective learning, the self-evaluation team should engage the whole school community in developing a plan for school improvement. This process should include students, who have a unique perspective on how schools and classrooms can be improved (Rudduck, 2007[6]). The views of students and their parents also help to understand how the school environment impacts student well-being and their overall development. This is important for evaluating achievement of a national vision focused on learners.

Data systems provide important inputs for evaluation

Administrative school data – like the number of students, their background and teacher information – provides important contextual information for internal and external evaluators. Increasingly, countries use information systems that collect information from schools for multiple purposes including evaluation and policy-making.

Most countries also collect information about school outcomes. Standardised assessments and national examinations provide comparative information about learning to national standards. Some countries also use this information to identify schools at risk of low performance and target evaluations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). However, since assessment results do not provide a full picture of a school, they are often

complemented by other information such as student retention and progression rates, student background, school financial information and previous evaluation results. A number of countries use this data to develop composite indicators of school performance that frequently inform evaluation and support school accountability.

Principals must be able to lead school improvement

Strong school leadership is essential for effective school self-evaluation, and school improvement more generally. Principals support evaluation and improvement through a number of leadership roles: defining the school's goals, observing instruction, supporting teachers' professional development and collaborating with teachers to improve instruction (Schleicher, 2015[8]). This diversity points to a major shift in their role in recent years, with principals increasingly leading instructional improvement.

Principals need a deep understanding of teaching and learning, and strong leadership skills to become instructional leaders

Most principals bring significant experience in the teaching profession – among the countries participating in the OECD Teacher and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the average principal has 21 years of teaching experience. Teaching experience alone, however, is not sufficient and the ability to demonstrate strong leadership of the school community is particularly important. Nearly 80% of principals in TALIS participating countries reported that they received training in instructional leadership either before or after taking up their position, or both (OECD, 2014[9]).

Principals' initial training must be complemented by opportunities for continued professional development once in post. One of the most effective types is collaborative professional learning activities, where principals work together to examine practices and acquire new knowledge (DuFour, 2004[10]). In countries where international assessment results suggest that learning levels are high, such as Australia, the Netherlands and Singapore, more than 80% of principals reported participating in these kinds of activities in the last 12 months (OECD, 2014[9]).

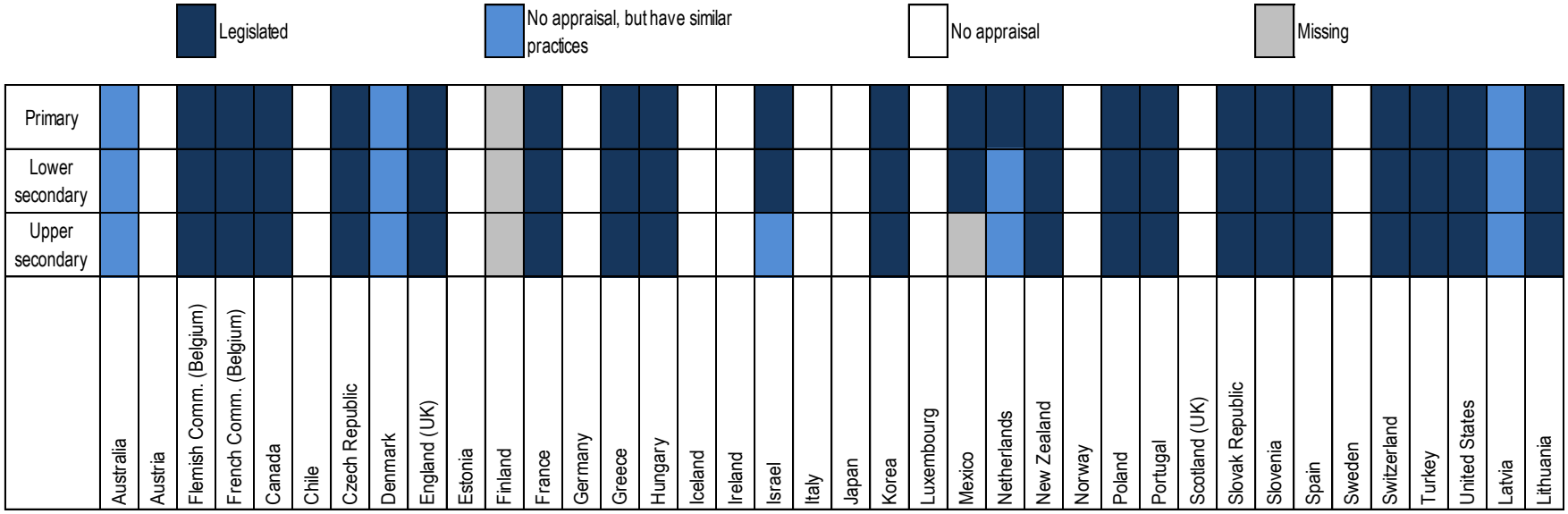
Professionalising school leadership – standards, selection and appraisal

Given the important role that principals occupy, OECD countries are taking steps to professionalise the role. A number of countries have developed professional principal standards that set out what a school leader is expected to know and be able to do. Principal standards should include how principals are expected to contribute to self-evaluation and improvement. Similar to teachers, principal standards guide the recruitment of principals, their training and appraisal.

Around half of OECD countries have legislated appraisal of school leaders (see Figure 4.3) (OECD, 2015[2]). These kinds of appraisals hold principals accountable for their leadership of the school, but also provide them with valuable professional feedback and support in their demanding role. Responsibility for principal appraisal varies. In some countries, it is led by central authorities, such as an inspectorate or the same body that undertakes external teacher appraisals. In others, it is the responsibility of a school-level body, such as the school board. While the latter provides the opportunity to ensure that appraisal closely reflects the school context, boards need significant support to appraise principals competently and fairly.

Figure 4.3. Existence of school leader appraisal in OECD countries, 2015

In general programmes



Note: Data for Lithuania are drawn from European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015[7]).
Sources: OECD (2015[2]), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015[7]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, http://doi.org/10.2797/678.

School leadership in Albania

School leadership capacity in Albania remains limited, with principals focused more on administrative tasks than instructional leadership. Historically, school leadership has not been viewed as a distinct professional role that is separate from teaching. Principals maintain a teaching load of four, six or eight hours per week depending on the size of their school. They are also appraised for performance-based salary increases as teachers rather than as school leaders. Albania is making efforts to address these issues with the establishment of a School of Directors to develop new school leadership policies.

While most teachers in Albania are women, the majority of school principals are men

Albania had 1 408 school principals, 1 047 at the basic education level (i.e. nine-year schools) and 361 at the secondary level, as of the 2014-15 school year (Çobaj, 2015[11]). Although a higher percentage of teachers and deputy principals in Albania is female at all levels of the pre-tertiary education system, fewer women are school leaders: 43% at the primary level and 34% at the secondary level in 2014-15 (Çobaj, 2015[11]). The reasons cited for this include factors that are commonly recognised as barriers to attracting candidates to the school leadership role, such as the difficulty of the job and the heavy workload (Çobaj, 2015[11]).

There is a high turnover rate among principals

School leadership has traditionally been viewed as a temporary position for teachers, and turnover in the principal role is high. This instability makes it difficult to rely on principals to help drive education reform in schools and develop instructional and managerial capacity. In a 2015 study, 84% of 521 teachers surveyed in Tirana, Shkodra, Kamez and Elbasan reported that the principals of their schools changed frequently (Nathanaili, 2015[12]). Of the five schools the review team visited, four of the principals had been in the role for five years or less, shorter than the average of nine years of experience among principals across OECD countries (OECD, 2014[9]). Decisions about the dismissal of principals have lacked transparency (European Policy Network on School Leadership, 2012[13]) and have been influenced by politics (UNESCO, 2017[14]). For example, in 2014, principals were dismissed *en masse* in Tirana, Shkodra and Fier for reasons that were reportedly politically motivated (Erebara, 2014[15]).

Albania has made efforts to address the politicisation of principal appointment decisions

The appointment of principals to schools in Albania has historically been influenced by politics (Nathanaili, 2015[12]). To address this, Albania introduced open competitions for the role in 2012. The process is now more transparent, and schools are given a greater say in who is appointed. An assessment commission, consisting of a representative of the local or regional education unit, the school board, the school's parent council, and the teachers' council, propose two applicants for the role. Despite these changes, appointment decisions still rest with one individual, the head of the regional directorate (formerly the head of the education office or regional education directorate), and there remain concerns that these decisions are influenced by politics.

Until recently, pre-service training for principals was not a requirement

Prior to 2018, the requirements to become a school principal in Albania included reaching the "qualified" teacher category, with at least five years of teaching experience (see Chapter 3), but not completion of pre-service training. Albania developed a pre-service training programme for principals in the past, but it was not delivered on a broad scale nor was it compulsory (UNESCO, 2017[14]). With the establishment of a new School of Directors (see below), mandatory training is now a requirement for principal certification. This is consistent with practices in European and OECD countries which commonly provide initial training to school principals on their key responsibilities (OECD, 2014[9]).

Continuous professional development specifically for school leaders has been limited

Continuous professional development opportunities for school principals reflect the lack of separation between the school leadership and teacher roles in Albania. Principals, like teachers, are required to participate in at least three days of continuous professional development each year in order to earn credits for a higher salary qualification. Principals are also required to participate in the same local professional learning networks as teachers. These networks are overseen by local education offices and deliver training using the train-the-trainer format (see Chapter 3). The current list of training topics identified as areas of need for teachers and principals in Albania relates to teaching responsibilities rather than school leadership responsibilities (AQAPUE, 2019[16]), and the professional learning networks also focus only on teaching topics.

A new School of Directors is intended to professionalise the role of the principal

In 2017, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (hereby, the ministry) established a School of Directors, a non-profit centre for educational leadership, with the support of the Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF). The School of Directors has been planned since 2012 but has taken time to establish due to a lack of funding, which is now being provided by the AADF for its first ten years of operation. The School of Directors contracted a needs assessment study and a review of the legal framework for the principal role in 2019. Results have informed the development of curriculum for pre-service training, which is being piloted. The organisation also plans to revise the school leadership standards, which were originally developed in 2011 but have not been used widely. Also planned is the development of new certification requirements, appraisal processes and professional learning opportunities for principals.

Principal appraisal is a requirement in Albania, but it does not happen regularly

Principals in Albania are supposed to be appraised by the director of their local education office every two years. However, this has not happened on a regular basis (UNESCO, 2017[14]). The process, as set out but not implemented regularly, would involve an appraisal of the principal based on their achievements in a professional plan. The plan includes indicators relating to school performance (e.g. student dropout rate, percentage of teacher absences, school ranking) and individual performance (e.g. number of training credits). Unlike most OECD countries with principal appraisal processes, principals in Albania have not been assessed against school leadership standards (OECD, 2015[2]). The purpose of the appraisal is also unclear. It would not inform decisions about principals' professional development activities nor their employment status. Instead, the appraisal would lead only to an evaluation report for the principal's professional portfolio.

Principals in Albania are subject to other appraisal processes, but these either do not relate to school leadership or do not occur with any regularity. Principals are appraised for promotion as part of the teacher career structure. They are required to pass a portfolio review and qualification exam that relates to their teaching subject or level (see Chapter 3) rather than their work as school leaders. School management is one field that may be assessed as part of external school evaluations, but few have been conducted in Albania.

Schools lack funding and the autonomy to make funding decisions

Schools in Albania are underfunded. The ministry has made efforts to address inequities by introducing grants to cover certain students' transportation and textbook costs (UNESCO, 2017[14]). However, many schools, particularly those in rural areas, struggle to meet their basic infrastructure needs (e.g. heating) (Gjokutaj, 2013[17]). They also lack instructional materials (OECD, 2016[3]). Funding continues to be inequitable. For example, some prefectures in Albania with high poverty rates, like Durrës, have low average annual expenditure per student (MoESY, 2018[18]; INSTAT, 2015[19]). Responsibility for school funding is divided in the following manner:

- Funding for schools' infrastructure and maintenance costs and non-teaching staff is provided by municipalities, either through locally derived funds or central grants distributed to local governments. Competitive government grants also cover some school infrastructure costs.
- The majority of schools' educational services (e.g. teachers' salaries, textbooks) is covered by central funding that flows through the regional directorates and local education offices. This funding does not take into account the particular contexts of the local area and schools (e.g. socio-economic status). Regional directorates and local education offices have full discretion over how funds are distributed to schools (MoESY, 2014[20]).

Schools have historically had minimal to no autonomy over budgetary decisions. The majority of principals in Albania's schools participating in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 reported having very limited decision-making power over budget allocation (OECD, 2016[3]). A lack of budgetary autonomy makes it particularly challenging for schools to put in place improvement measures in response to school evaluation results. In 2018, the government allowed schools to open bank accounts for the first time, to be managed by the school board, and deposit discretionary funds from parents and private donors. In areas with lower socio-economic status, a lack of private funds will put schools at a further disadvantage.

There is evidence of distributed leadership in Albania's schools

Principals in Albania are supported by deputy principals, who share both administrative responsibilities (e.g. collecting and reporting data) and instructional responsibilities (e.g. appraising teachers and observing their classrooms). Like principals, they will now be required to participate in pre-service training and obtain a certificate to take on the role. Principals are also supported by the heads of each of the school's subject teams, which consist of teachers who share the same profile (i.e. teach the same curriculum subject or at the same level). Subject team heads play roles in staff development (see Chapter 3) and school self-evaluation. This distribution of leadership among staff in different middle management and teacher leader roles is a positive feature of Albania's education system. On average, OECD countries are adopting more distributed approaches to leadership in schools to lessen the workload burden on principals and increase schools' effectiveness (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). However, in Albania, teacher leaders like subject

team heads have not received specific training for their roles. This type of training for teacher leaders now exists in OECD countries such as the United Kingdom (namely in England and Northern Ireland) (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).

School boards play a limited role

Since 2012, every school in Albania has been required to have its own board comprising parents, students, teachers and representatives of local government and the community. The board is supposed to fulfil many functions related to school development planning, budgeting and school self-evaluation (e.g. approving the four-year mid-term and annual plan, the budget plan and the members of the school's self-evaluation committee). However, in practice, their role is limited to providing financial contributions (MoESY, 2014[20]). School board members do not receive any training for their responsibilities (Gabrščeк, 2016[22]). While the school board is evaluated as part of external school evaluations, the fact that so few evaluations are actually conducted means that boards lack feedback on how they might play a more active role. In Albania's *Strategy on Pre-University Education Development 2014-2020*, the ministry identified better activation of the school board, as well as other school bodies, like the parent council and teachers' council, as key to developing school autonomy (MoESY, 2014[20]).

School evaluation in Albania

School evaluation in Albania is undergoing important changes. These changes include the establishment of a new central agency that will be responsible for revising school evaluation indicators and developing training for evaluators. They also include the creation of regional directorates to conduct external school evaluations and provide more support to schools to follow up on external school evaluation findings. The new organisational structure is intended to ensure that more external school evaluations can be conducted and that they will have a real impact on school quality through closer, improvement-focused support to schools. However, at present, no single entity leads the overall management and implementation of external school evaluations. Albania is planning to make regional evaluators responsible for supporting the schools they evaluate, even though this responsibility will contrast with their need to maintain objectivity. In addition, while schools conduct regular self-evaluations, they do not yet use results to improve their practices in part because they lack training and guidance in this area.

Table 4.1. Types of school evaluation in Albania

Types of school evaluation	Reference standards	Body responsible	Guideline document	Process	Frequency	Use
External school evaluation	The school evaluation framework in inspection and internal assessment of schools (guidance for full school inspection) (2011)	The Quality Assurance Agency and regional directorates (previously, State Inspectorate of Education)	Methodology of inspection and internal assessment of pre-university education institutions (2011)	1) Pre-inspection 2) Inspection 3) Completion of inspection 4) Delivery of inspection report	Infrequently Originally planned: once every four years	To ensure legal compliance and help schools improve.
School self-evaluation		School self-evaluation team	Methodology of inspection and internal assessment of pre-university education institutions (2011) Normative provisions (2013)	1) Self-evaluation team is selected and defines scope 2) Subject teams conduct evaluation activities and analyse results; 3) Self-evaluation team judges performance on a scale of 1-4 4) Report is drafted 5) Report is shared internally	Once per year	To identify strengths and weakness and to inform the school development plan.

Source: MoESY (2018[18]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

External evaluation

The school evaluation framework is dense but not all fields are inspected

Albania is in the process of revising its school evaluation framework, which was originally developed in 2011 to serve as the main reference for external school evaluation and school self-evaluation. The 2011 framework covers seven possible areas: the applied curriculum, teaching and learning, school climate and ethics, student care, school management, development of human resources, and students' evaluation and achievement. These reflect many of the school evaluation areas that are identified as important in the research literature, although the framework does not address equity as measured by the progress and achievement of all learners. The framework is also very dense. The seven fields are divided into 51 subfields, 93 indicators and 654 descriptors (called "instruments") that further describe the indicators (see Table 4.2). Unlike an increasing number of OECD countries, Albania does not have a national vision of a good school to help focus school evaluations on the factors that are most important to school quality (OECD, 2013[1]).

External school evaluators in Albania decide on the fields and indicators that will be the focus of each full school inspection on a case-by-case basis, which makes it difficult to compare results across schools. Full school inspections result in a rating of one (very good) to four (poor) for each field and indicator evaluated and an overall rating. School evaluation framework guidelines contain helpful descriptions of what a school's practices would look like from levels one to four. These include both qualitative descriptors (e.g. teaching and learning practices) and administrative compliance descriptors.

Table 4.2. Excerpt from the school evaluation framework

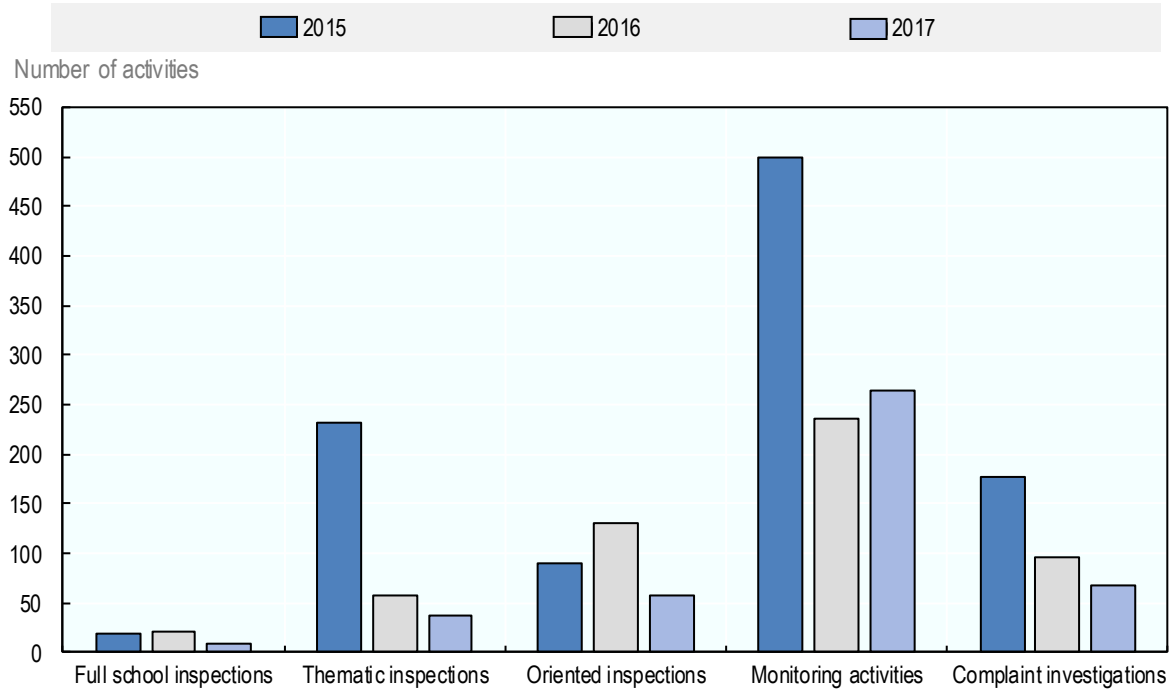
Field: Teaching and learning
Subfield: Methodology
Indicator: The methodology, techniques and strategies used will ensure the achievement of the teaching objectives
Instruments The teacher develops classroom methods, techniques and teaching strategies based on his/her plan • Methods, techniques and teaching strategies create opportunities for individual and student group work • Methods, techniques, and selected strategies are closely related to the content and objectives of the classroom • The teacher provides assignments that encourage the active involvement of students • Students work individually (in minutes, seconds) in the classroom • Students work in groups (in minutes, seconds) • The teacher's explanation is clear, understandable, and appropriate for students • The teacher uses different lessons for reflection, clarification and instruction to facilitate learning • The teaching time is naturally flowing and connected • The lesson is open to the participation of interested individuals, such as colleagues, parents, etc. • At the end of the lesson, the teacher and students draw conclusions or give feedback

Source: AQAPUE (2011[23]), *Inspektimi Dhe Vlerësimi i Brendshëm i Shkollës (Udhëzues për Inspektimin e Plotë të Shkollës) [Internal School Inspection and Evaluation (Guide for Full School Inspection)]*, Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education, Tirana.

Albania's former State Inspectorate of Education lacked the resources to carry out its mandate

The ministry's former regional education directorates and education offices (RED/EOs), which were each responsible for a set number of schools, conducted external school evaluations until 2010 when Albania centralised this responsibility. The country established an independent school inspectorate, which became the State Inspectorate of Education in 2014. The inspectorate's responsibilities included managing the school evaluation framework and guidelines and conducting school inspections and other monitoring activities. However, a lack of human and financial resources prevented the inspectorate from fulfilling its mandate. For example, the inspectorate was originally supposed to be allotted 120 inspectors, but as of 2019, they employed around 30. Figure 4.4 shows the reduction in the inspectorate's activities over time. All pre-tertiary schools in Albania were supposed to be fully inspected once every four years, which is similar to the practice across OECD countries, where schools tend to be evaluated every three to five years (OECD, 2015[2]). However, less than 1% of Albania's schools were inspected annually in recent years (18 in 2015, 20 in 2016, and 9 in 2017) (AQAPUE, 2015[24]; AQAPUE, 2016[25]; AQAPUE, 2017[26]). In addition, the overall results of these inspections were positive, which suggests that schools in real need of improvement may not have been selected for inspection.

Figure 4.4. Reduction in inspectorate activities



Sources: AQAPUE (2015[24]), *Raporti Vjetor 2015 [Annual Report 2015]*, Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-university Education, Tirana; AQAPUE (2016[25]), *Raporti Vjetor 2016 [Annual Report 2016]*, Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-university Education, Tirana; AQAPUE (2017[26]) *Raporti Vjetor 2017 [Annual Report 2017]*, Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-university Education, Tirana.

Responsibility for school evaluation is now divided between different bodies

As of 2019, responsibility for school evaluation is now split between different bodies, contrary to practices in most OECD countries where one institution has full responsibility (OECD, 2013[1]). Albania merged the inspectorate with the Education Development Institute to create the Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-University Education (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency), which has a broad mandate covering many policy areas including curriculum design, teacher professional development, school evaluation and system performance evaluation. The Quality Assurance Agency's school evaluation responsibilities include managing the school evaluation framework and guidelines and training external school evaluators. Evaluators are now based in Albania's four new regional directorates. They do not report directly to the Quality Assurance Agency. Instead, the directorates fall under the jurisdiction of the ministry's new executive arm, the General Directorate of Pre-University Education (hereby, the General Directorate). The re-organisation has not been accompanied by additional funds. This suggests that the Quality Assurance Agency and the regional directorates, which have traditionally been under-resourced, may struggle to fulfil their new mandates.

External school evaluations have focused on the quality of instruction

The Quality Assurance Agency is in the process of revising Albania's school evaluation methodology. The methodology that has existed since 2011 consists of steps that are common to external school evaluations across Europe. These include a pre-inspection during which evaluators gather initial information about the school to determine the scope

and focus of the inspection, a school visit, and the preparation of an inspection report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). The length of the school visit (typically two days) and sources of evidence for evaluations (e.g. administrative information, classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students and parent questionnaires) are also common internationally. Classroom observations have been considered a key component of all external school evaluations, which is a positive practice. However, the level of guidance provided to evaluators to conduct them is unclear.

The inspectorate's external school evaluations resulted in verbal feedback and a final report that was signed by the inspectorate's Chief Inspector and posted on the inspectorate's website. This practice is consistent with an increasing number of European countries that publicly share inspection reports to encourage schools to respond to findings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). An example of a final report shared with the review team contained helpful information for schools, including detailed findings for each indicator evaluated and brief recommendations for improvement for each overall field.

Schools have received limited follow-up support after an inspection

While external school evaluations resulted in recommendations, and inspectors may have suggested timelines for their implementation, schools in Albania have not been required to develop an action plan in response to inspection findings. This is a requirement in other Western Balkan countries, like North Macedonia and Serbia, to help ensure that all schools act upon recommendations for improvement. When the inspectorate existed, schools that received a "poor" rating on their full school inspection, in any field or overall, were re-inspected (Gray, 2014[27]). Schools could be subject to legislated penalties, like warnings and fines. The head of the local education office had the authority to dismiss the principal of a school that received two "poor" ratings within a five-year period.

Albania has not provided schools with support to follow up on inspection results in the past. The country's re-organisation of regional and local education offices in 2019 was implemented in part to increase this type of support. However, if the same individuals in the regional directorates are responsible for both evaluating and supporting schools, this may negatively impact both functions.

In the past, inspectors received minimal training

Inspectors with the former inspectorate were appointed by the Chief Inspector. Their profiles were similar to those of school evaluators in other European countries in that those who inspected teaching and learning quality were expected to have experience in schools or other education bodies (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). However, inspectors' objectivity and capacity were an ongoing concern (MoESY, 2014[20]). Their initial training was much shorter than the average across Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]), and they had access to few continuous professional development opportunities to update their skills.

Albania's new regional school evaluators reportedly have experience as teachers. The review team lacks additional information about their profiles, how they are being appointed, and the content of the Quality Assurance Agency's training for them.

Internal evaluation

School self-evaluation is mandatory, but it is not informing school improvement

Annual school self-evaluation is mandatory in Albania's schools. All students participating in PISA 2015 were in schools that conducted self-evaluations (OECD, 2016[3]). Every year, the principal appoints a self-evaluation team, which includes the school leader and the heads of each subject team, to conduct the process. They select specific subfields and indicators under one or two of the seven fields in the school evaluation framework and develop a plan to evaluate them. The school's subject teams are responsible for gathering and analysing evidence. The school self-evaluation team drafts a final assessment report based on input and ratings from each subject team, as well as other sources of evidence. This is shared internally and with local education offices, regional directorates and external school evaluators upon request.

While schools conduct self-evaluations, they reportedly view them as an administrative requirement and do not use results to meaningful improve. Schools are supposed to use self-evaluations to inform their school development plans (i.e. their four-year mid-term plan and annual plan), but this is not happening in practice. Almost half of Albania's principals in schools participating in the PISA 2015 survey reported that school self-evaluation did not influence the quality of teaching and learning in their school (OECD, 2016[3]).

The principal's role in school self-evaluation is unclear

Albania's school self-evaluation methodology suggests a high level of staff involvement, which is a positive feature of the country's system. However, the role of the principal in the school self-evaluation process is ambiguous. Although principals belong to the self-evaluation team, the school evaluation methodology guidelines state that they should not intervene in or affect the outcome of the process (AQAPUE, 2011[28]). By contrast, internationally, principals generally lead the school self-evaluation process because it fits naturally with their leadership role in school development, including the expectation that they work to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school (OECD, 2013[1]).

Schools lack capacity to conduct meaningful self-evaluations

In contrast to most OECD countries, no training is available to school staff in Albania who undertake school self-evaluations (OECD, 2013[1]). The inspectorate provided schools with school evaluation framework and methodology guidelines. However, the latter was designed more to support external school evaluation than school self-evaluation. Schools have received few resources to help them conduct self-evaluations. Furthermore, schools' self-evaluation practices are not necessarily assessed as part of external school evaluations because the fields that are evaluated change from school to school. This limits the feedback schools receive on their practices and may signal that self-evaluation is not important.

Capacity limitations, particularly around use of evidence and analysis of findings, were evident in a sample school self-evaluation report that was provided to the review team. For example, to assess teaching and learning quality, the school relied mainly on students' grade point averages and pass rates. The schools' self-evaluation did not involve other important sources of evidence that would allow the school to obtain a balanced perspective, such as classroom observations.

School-level data and its use

Albania's external and internal school evaluations are expected to involve a review of schools' administrative data (e.g. the number of students and teachers, information about the physical environment of the school and its finances) and learning outcome data. The latter includes standardised student achievement data from the National Basic Education Exam at the end of lower secondary education and the State Matura Examination at the end of upper secondary education. The Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF) provides an additional source of standardised student achievement data, but since it was only introduced state-wide in 2015-16, it is not referenced in the school evaluation framework as a data source. Issues with the administration and marking of the National Basic Education Exam and the VANAF make these unreliable sources of data to compare student outcomes (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5).

School performance cards have been used to rank schools rather than to support school self-evaluation

Albania introduced school performance cards in 2014 as a tool to increase schools' accountability for providing quality education and to encourage competition among schools. Their introduction was a positive signal that Albania intends to focus discussions of school quality on evidence. Each year, schools have compiled data for the cards and submitted this to their RED/EOs (now regional directorates and local education offices), which ranked the schools in their area and posted the results on their website.

The school performance card data has included: national indicators defined by the ministry, up to 16 for basic education schools and up to 12 for secondary schools (see Table 4.3), and one or two indicators defined by RED/EOs. Some of the indicators in the card are not real measures of school quality. For example, the number of continuous professional development credits teachers compile does not relate to the quality of the school's teaching and learning practices.

Schools have perceived the school performance card as an administrative burden that is purely used for school rankings rather than a tool for self-evaluation. RED/EOs were supposed to use the rankings to identify the best and weakest schools in their area to provide adapted follow-up, while parents could use them to exercise the limited amount of school choice available in Albania. However, the rankings have not provided fair and accurate reflections of schools' performance. This is because each RED/EO has included all schools in their area in the same ranking, regardless of their particular circumstances (e.g. size of school, student population). This has disfavoured certain schools, like those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and has not recognised their real added-value.

Table 4.3. Nationally defined indicators in the school performance card

- Percentage of students who dropped out compared to the number of students registered at the beginning of the school year
- Percentage of students' absences compared to total teaching hours during the school year
- Student pass rate on the National Basic Education Exam and the State Matura Exam
- Students' average grade on the National Basic Education Exam and State Matura Exam
- Percentage of students with a difference (in absolute value) of greater than one grade on these exams and the annual grade they received from their school
- Student pass rate and average grade on the test organised locally for grades I-III
- Student pass rate and average grade on the test organised locally for grades other than I-III
- Difference (in absolute value) between the average student's grade and these tests
- Percentage of students that have a difference (in absolute value) of more than one grade on these tests and their annual classroom results
- Average number of continuous professional development credits gained form the education workers of the school (principal, deputy principal and teachers) during the academic year
- Percentage of educational workers (principal and teachers) who participated in professional networks
- Teachers' results on qualification exams (for qualified, specialist and master levels) in the past five academic years
- Number of winners of ministry competitions
- Number of awards won by the school in local educational unit competitions
- Number of projects won by the school nationally and internationally
- Percentage of students who obtain their top three choices in university completion
- The school's realisation of the objective/s in their annual plan

Source: MoESY (2014[29]) *Udhëzuesi Për Cartën e Performancës Së Shkollës [Guide to the School Performance Card,* Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

Policy issues

Albania is making efforts to improve its school evaluation system to enhance school quality. However, some aspects of the recent re-organisation of external school evaluation governance and processes have moved it further away from the practices of countries that have invested in objective, high-quality school evaluations. As a priority, Albania should make one body, the Quality Assurance Agency, responsible for external school evaluation. In this capacity, the Quality Assurance Agency should assume authority for regional evaluators and undertake revisions to the school evaluation indicator framework so that all external evaluations focus on areas that are key to school quality. Albania's intention to offer schools regional support to improve the quality of their practices is positive. However, Albania should ensure that it is provided by dedicated school support staff who do not play a role in evaluation. Albania also needs to provide training, tools and data to build schools' capacity to conduct self-evaluations for improvement. Finally, changes to the school evaluation system are unlikely to have an impact on school quality unless Albania provides schools with sufficient financial resources to fund improvement measures and strengthens school leadership. Albania's new School of Directors should play a key role in enhancing school principals' ability to improve teaching and learning.

Policy issue 4.1. Consolidating responsibility for an independent external school evaluation system focused on school quality

Albania has changed their school evaluation system to try to ensure that more external school evaluations will be conducted, recognising the importance of monitoring school quality and helping schools to improve. However, in doing so, Albania has divided responsibility for external school evaluation between multiple bodies. The Quality Assurance Agency now manages the school evaluation framework, guidelines and evaluator training, but does not oversee the work of evaluators in the regional directorates who report to the ministry's General Directorate. This may negatively impact the quality

of external school evaluations. Evaluators in the regional directorates will have conflicting mandates if they are also responsible for supporting schools in response to their evaluations, as planned. Albania should re-visit the mandates of the Quality Assurance Agency and the General Directorate and the role of the regional school evaluators to address these issues. Albania should also develop training for evaluators that offers better preparation for their role than what has existed in the past. This will help to ensure that schools trust evaluators and their recommendations for improvement. The development of a core set of school evaluation indicators and a national vision of a good school will also help schools to improve by concentrating the attention of evaluators and schools on areas that are most important to school quality.

Recommendation 4.1.1. Ensure the integrity of external school evaluation

Making one body responsible for overseeing and implementing external school evaluations would help to strengthen the integrity of the evaluations and enhance efficiency. Albania should also take a different approach to staffing external school evaluations at the regional level to improve quality, expand capacity and reduce costs. All evaluators should receive sufficient training and be subject to an ethical code to ensure that they can conduct their activities effectively and with integrity.

Make the Quality Assurance Agency the sole authority responsible for external school evaluation

In contrast to Albania's recent division of school evaluation responsibilities, an increasing number of OECD and European countries have made inspections the responsibility of an independent central inspectorate (OECD, 2013[1]). For example, Romania is among the emerging economies in Eastern Europe that have established state school inspectorates to prioritise school evaluation as a core governance function, ensure the quality of inspections and provide an objective perspective on national education policies (see Box 4.1). To gain these benefits without re-establishing a separate inspectorate, Albania should make the Quality Assurance Agency fully responsible for external school evaluation at the central and regional levels and make school evaluation a dedicated priority area within the Quality Assurance Agency's broader mandate. This would mean:

- **Granting the Quality Assurance Agency direct authority over regional school evaluators.** Regional evaluators should be accountable to the Quality Assurance Agency rather than the General Directorate. Evaluators could be hosted by the regional directorates, but the Quality Assurance Agency should recruit, train, certify and employ them (see below). The Quality Assurance Agency should also authorise external school evaluation findings and post reports of results on their website.
- **Ensuring strong leadership for school evaluation within the Quality Assurance Agency**. The ministry should reinstate the role of Chief Inspector. The Chief Inspector would have overall responsibility for the quality and integrity of school evaluations and help to elevate the importance of school evaluation within the institution.

- **Providing a dedicated budget for school evaluation**. The inspectorate that preceded the Quality Assurance Agency lacked sufficient resources to implement the school evaluation system proposed in 2010. The budget for school evaluation now appears to be split between the General Directorate and the Quality Assurance Agency. Within the latter agency, school evaluation will have to compete for funds with these other areas, which risks a continuation of chronic underfunding. Instead, the ministry should provide a separate, sustainable funding stream for school evaluation to ensure that sufficient resources are available to refine school evaluation indicators and guidelines, develop tools and resources, and hire and train all external school evaluators.
- **Co-ordinating reform efforts within the Quality Assurance Agency**. The review team heard concerns that the inspectorate's work was not taken into account in education policy making. Albania should put processes and structures in place to ensure that different policy areas within the Quality Assurance Agency inform each other's work. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency should take school evaluation results into account when periodically identifying teachers' training needs (see Chapter 3) and updating the school curriculum. The Chief Inspector and other Quality Assurance Agency department heads should regularly advise each other and the Minister of Education, Sports and Youth on issues of school quality. To support system reforms, the Quality Assurance Agency could also produce regular reports on the quality of the education system, similar to those produced by Romania's Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Prioritising school evaluation in Romania

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (hereby, the agency) was created in 2005 by the Quality Assurance Law, which provided the basis for the current school evaluation system in Romania. The agency is a permanent external school evaluation body, separate from the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, with its own legal status and budget.

The agency's main function is external evaluation and it is responsible for developing national quality standards and performance indicators. After an evaluation, the agency advises the ministry of education whether a school should be granted provisional authorisation, initial accreditation or recurrent evaluation.

Other than external evaluation, the agency also provides guidelines and a template model for school self-evaluation and makes recommendations to the government on issues of quality education. The agency publishes an annual activity report and releases another on the state of quality in education at the national level every four years.

As in other European countries, the agency works with evaluators with significant teaching experience to carry out their external evaluations. Candidates must have experience in the evaluation domain and, once selected, must follow an 89-hour training programme in order to assume their positions.

Sources: SICI (n.d.[30]), *Country Profile Romania: Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education*, http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/getattachment/1cbc0561-c91b-4c71-a71c-6b9369ecad61; Kitchen,H. et al. (2017[31]), *Romania 2017,* https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264274051-en; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015[7]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, http://dx.doi.org/10.2797/678.

Recruit and contract new regional external school evaluators

Albania is considering making the same individuals in the new regional directorates responsible for both evaluating schools and providing them with support to improve the quality of their practices. However, evaluators need to have sufficient objectivity and distance from responsibility for a school's performance to avoid bias (OECD, 2013[1]). Their evaluative role would also impede the development of strong, supportive relationships with schools. Due to chronic underfunding and understaffing issues in Albania, they may also struggle to conduct all of their evaluation duties. Albania should:

- **Separate the external school evaluation and support functions**. Instead of the evaluators, dedicated regional directorate staff should be responsible for supporting schools (see Policy issue 4.2). While the Quality Assurance Agency and the General Directorate staff up separate school evaluation and support personnel, in the immediate term, specialists who are already working in a regional directorate could support schools in their own area but evaluate schools in a different region to ensure the independence of the evaluation process.
- **Supplement evaluation teams with contracted evaluators**. In the medium term, this will address capacity challenges in the regional directorates, ensure that school evaluations are conducted by individuals with relevant expertise, and allow a broad array of educators to bring back what they learn to their schools. Contracting evaluators will also be more cost-effective than relying solely on permanent staff to conduct evaluations. Contracted evaluators could include highly qualified teachers, such as those at the highest level of the new career structure (see Chapter 3), principals and deputy principals, and staff from within the Quality Assurance Agency or other central education agencies. Contracting educators as evaluators is a common practice in OECD and European countries, including the United Kingdom (Scotland) (OECD, 2013[1]) (see Box 4.2). The Quality Assurance Agency might also consider contracting experts from a range of fields to evaluate schools in specific areas when warranted (e.g. health, inclusive education). Over time, Albania could move towards a model in which most evaluators are contracted.
- **Recruit school evaluators with relevant competencies**. New evaluators are reportedly being recruited among the teaching staff of a given region, but the specific qualifications for the position are unclear. The Quality Assurance Agency should ensure that all external school evaluators, whether contracted or permanent, have the competencies needed to effectively conduct their role. Internationally, these generally include expertise in school evaluation and school improvement, analytical skills and knowledge of relevant legislation (Faubert, 2009[32]). The Quality Assurance Agency should consider establishing a recruitment panel to interview and select evaluators based on clear selection criteria related to these competencies. This will help to ensure that the process is transparent and impervious to political influence. This was a concern under Albania's old system, given that decisions to appoint school inspectors were made by a single person, the Chief Inspector, who was politically appointed (Council of Europe, 2013[33]).

Box 4.2. Contracted school inspectors in Scotland, United Kingdom

In Scotland (United Kingdom), school inspection teams include:

- full-time inspectors employed by Education Scotland, the central inspection body;
- contracted associate assessors (i.e. high-performing principals, deputy principals and local education unit staff) who join inspection teams three times a year; and
- individuals with diverse backgrounds who are selected and trained for their role.

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015[7]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, http://doi.org/10.2797/678 (accessed on 18 November 2019).

Provide evaluators with appropriate training for their role

Under Albania's old system, inspectors with the inspectorate received limited preparation and continuous professional development. A lack of initial and ongoing training restricts school inspectors' ability to conduct inspections that support school improvement and undermines their authority. Inspectors' initial training was only two weeks in length, far shorter than the several months or more of training, on average, for new inspectors across Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). The training was also general, intended for all new public servants, rather than specific to school inspection. It is unclear whether a probation period, which is described in legislation, was provided systematically. The initial test of inspectors for confirmation was also not sufficiently specific to their role.

As of fall 2019, the Quality Assurance Agency has reportedly begun to deliver training to new regional school evaluators, but the review team lacks details about its contents and the breadth of the roll-out. Albania should:

- **Provide sufficient initial training to school evaluators.** The mandatory initial training for regional school evaluators should be longer and more relevant than the training that was delivered to inspectors in the past. It should be of sufficient length to cover key topics like how to use the revised school evaluation indicators (see Recommendation 4.1.2), gather meaningful evidence, and provide formative feedback. The training should be practical, drawing from specific, real-world examples. It should also allow evaluators to try out inspection practices to assure inter-rater reliability and, in the future, shadow experienced evaluators. For example, in Lithuania, initial training includes 80 hours of theoretical training and 45 hours of practical training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). Any probationary period for new school evaluators should involve the provision of constructive feedback on the implementation of evaluation techniques.
- **Consider developing training with the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI).** The Quality Assurance Agency could work with SICI or countries with experience providing training to school inspectors to develop and initially deliver training to Albania's new regional school evaluators. It could then be handed over to the Quality Assurance Agency to deliver on an ongoing basis.
- **Make certification requirements relevant to school evaluation.** In addition to requiring successful completion of initial training, the Quality Assurance Agency may opt to continue to require school evaluators to pass a test for certification. This is a common requirement for prospective inspectors in OECD countries (Faubert, 2009[32]). However, in order to be a meaningful assessment of readiness to serve as a school evaluator, the test should be specific to their role.

- **Provide a budget for continuous professional development**. The ministry should ensure that the Quality Assurance Agency has a budget for training school evaluators on an ongoing basis. Training should cover, among other things, reforms to teaching and learning that are relevant to school evaluation. Training topics and resources could also be informed by the results of stakeholder feedback on the external school evaluation process. As with initial training, ongoing training should also provide evaluators with practical learning opportunities.
- **Provide guidance on classroom observations**. Given the importance of classroom observations in school evaluation combined with the difficulty of reliably evaluating something as subjective as the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, inspectors need significant guidance (OECD, 2013[1]). The extent of classroom observation guidance that has been provided to evaluators in Albania is unclear. The Quality Assurance Agency should review it and consider making enhancements. School inspectors generally benefit from things like a classroom observation protocol that describes how they should conduct themselves and what they should review and observe, as well as indicators to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, like those developed by the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching (ICALT) (van De Grift, 2007[34]).

Ensure evaluators conduct their responsibilities with integrity

Stakeholders with whom the review team met spoke of inspectors with the inspectorate being susceptible to corruption. Indeed, in 2019, the Albanian government announced its intention to combat corruption by introducing new recruitment procedures for inspectors across the country's different inspectorates (INSQ, 2019[35]). In addition to conducting transparent recruitment procedures, as recommended above, the Quality Assurance Agency should take other measures to build trust in evaluators so that schools will accept their findings. In particular, the Quality Assurance Agency should enforce ethical standards for the evaluator role. These could be based on the standards for inspectors set out in the inspectorate's internal regulations. However, the Quality Assurance Agency should review these to determine whether there are any gaps in the descriptions of principles evaluators are expected to follow and in the unethical practices they should avoid. The Quality Assurance Agency should make new evaluators aware of this ethical code as part of their initial training and dismiss evaluators who violate the code.

Recommendation 4.1.2. Review and revise the school evaluation framework

The design of Albania's full school inspection process, as set out in the school evaluation framework, was based on European models, including Scotland's (United Kingdom), and on models designed by other members of SICI. The features of Albania's framework, including the four-year evaluation cycle, sources of evidence, length of school visits, and composition of evaluation teams, are consistent with international practice. However, the school evaluation indicators are lengthy and dense. This increases the likelihood that the indicators will be used as a checklist rather than a meaningful evaluation tool. Albania should revise the indicators to identify core areas that should be the focus of every full external school evaluation. In addition, Albania should make use of their education management information system (EMIS) as soon as possible to increase the reliability and efficiency of school evaluations.

Focus inspections on core indicators of school quality

Inspectors in Albania have decided on the fields and indicators that will be the focus of each full school inspection on a case-by-case basis. This has not allowed the inspectorate to compare results across schools, nor has it guaranteed that all important areas are covered. For example, a review of the inspectorate's annual reports between 2015 and 2017 suggests that full school inspections did not evaluate schools' development of human resources, which is key to improving teaching practice. The Quality Assurance Agency is reportedly in the process of refining it. In doing this, the Quality Assurance Agency should work with stakeholders and educators to:

- **Develop a core set of roughly 10 to 15 indicators**. These should cover areas that are most important to school quality, including: the quality of teaching and learning; student learning progress; the quality of instructional leadership; and the school's self-evaluation practices and the extent to which they focus on teaching and learning. These are all areas addressed in Scotland's (United Kingdom) indicator framework (see Box 4.3). Indicators should take into account Albania's particular circumstances, including national education priorities (see Chapter 5) and specific challenges that are known to affect school quality in the country, such as whether schools' basic infrastructure and operational needs are being met.
- **Better address equity, including all learners' development**. At present, the framework looks at schools' inclusive practices, but it does not look at progress and outcomes for different student groups (e.g. students from minority backgrounds). By contrast, Education Scotland's framework assesses not only schools' measures to promote equity but also whether they have raised attainment for all learners, especially the most disadvantaged students (Education Scotland, 2015[36]). Adding this type of indicator would allow Albania to assess and respond to inequities in outcomes across Albania's schools and student groups.
- **Reduce repetition**. There appears to be repetition across different subfields and indicators in the framework. One example is that the "teaching and learning" field contains a subfield on "evaluation" that includes some of the same content as the "students' evaluation and achievement" field.

While all full external school evaluations should focus on the core indicators, the Quality Assurance Agency could work with regional school evaluators to evaluate other areas on a less frequent basis or through thematic inspections. These areas could be selected based on, among other things, the Quality Assurance Agency's system monitoring and input from the General Directorate and the regional directorates.

Box 4.3. Education Scotland's school evaluation indicator framework

In the early 1990s, Scotland (United Kingdom) began developing indicators for school evaluation. Over the course of two decades, based on feedback and examinations of how the most effective schools were evaluating themselves, the framework was pared down to the most essential indicators. The current school evaluation framework of Education Scotland includes 15 indicators grouped in three areas: how good is our leadership and approach to improvement; how good is the quality of care and education we offer; and how good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners? For each indicator, there are two to four themes which further describe the indicator. For example:

Area: How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?	
Indicator	Themes
Self-evaluation for self-improvement	Collaborative approaches to self- evaluation Analysis and evaluation of intelligence and data Ensuring impact on learners' successes and achievements

Each indicator is also accompanied by illustrations of what an evaluation of a "very good" might look like, examples of highly effective practice, and challenge questions to support professional dialogue regarding the indicator.

Source: Education Scotland (2015[36]), https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2_HGIOS4.pdf.(accessed on 18 November 2019).

Develop a national vision of a good school

Albania should consider developing a single, holistic national vision of a good school and including it at the start of a revised school evaluation indicator framework. This will help focus evaluators and schools on the core purpose of school evaluation, to create schools where students can learn and thrive. The vision should be connected to national education priorities, which will help to ensure schools are focused on these areas (see Chapter 5). A vision is generally short and simple to ensure that it is easy to interpret and use. The process of developing the vision should be consultative, gathering input from students, teachers and schools about what they consider to be the most important characteristics of good schools (see Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. Defining a good school at the national level

Education systems develop a definition of a "good school" at the national level in order to provide standard quality criteria for the evaluation of educational processes and outcomes. This common definition of effectiveness often includes several characteristics, including the quality of teaching and learning, how teachers are developed and made more effective, the quality of instructional leadership, the use of assessment for learning, the rate and equity of student outcomes and progress, setting the school's vision and expectations, self-evaluation practices and factors concerning the curriculum.

A shared, future-focused and compelling vision at the national level can provide direction and steering to an educational system, bringing key actors together to work toward achieving the vision. It should be shared across all levels of the education system, while allowing space for interpretation based on local or regional differences. A clearly

communicated and shared vision can also help ensure reforms continue in the long term, particularly when faced with challenges or obstacles.

- **Ontario's (Canada)** vision for education explicitly incorporates goals:
  Ontario's vision for education is focused on four core goals: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence.
- In 2008, the government of **Japan** developed the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education, in which it set out a 10-year education vision:
  1) To cultivate, in all children, the foundations for independence within society by the time they complete compulsory education
  2) To develop human resources capable of supporting and developing our society and leading the international society.
- In **Estonia**, the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 guides the formal education system, as well as in-service, non-formal and informal education and retraining. The vision for 2020 is:
  Learning is a lifestyle. Development opportunities are noticed and smart solutions are pursued.

In order to develop their national vision, many countries undertake a consultation process. Such a strategy helps to gather input, engage stakeholders and build consensus. Moreover, when education stakeholders, including teachers, support the vision it is more likely they will dedicate time and energy to their roles. Indeed, effective policy implementation requires a shared vision, and the acceptance, ownership and legitimacy of a policy's plan, purpose and the process of change must be developed among actors in order to move toward the vision.

Sources: OECD (2013[1]), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en; Government of Ontario (2019[37]), Education in Ontario, https://www.ontario.ca/page/education-ontario (accessed on 12 July 2019); MEXT (2008[38]), *Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (Provisional translation)*, http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/lawandplan/title01/detail01/1373797.htm (accessed on 12 July 2019); Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia (2014[39]), *The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*, https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019); Burns, T., F. Köster and M. Fuster (2016[40]), *Education Governance in Action: Lessons from Case Studies*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264262829-en.

Use the education management information system to collect data for evaluations as soon as possible

School evaluators in Albania collect and review a range of data about schools as part of their work (e.g. student achievement data, information about the physical environment and finances of the school). Once Albania's EMIS, Socrates, is more fully developed (see Chapter 5), school evaluators should access as much information as possible directly from the system for use in all types of inspections. This will enable more reliable comparisons between schools, given that this data will be of better quality than what is collected at present. Using the EMIS will also increase the efficiency of evaluations, free up the time of evaluators and school staff, and make the evaluation process less burdensome for schools. Albania's new local education offices, which are responsible for the day-to-day monitoring of schools, should also make use of the EMIS to minimise data requests to schools.

Policy issue 4.2. Ensuring that external inspections support school improvement

In comparison to OECD and neighbouring Western Balkan countries, Albania places few expectations on schools to respond to external school evaluations. Schools are not required to act upon the conclusions of school inspections and address them in their school development plans. This may lead to school evaluations having very little if any impact on school improvement. This issue is aggravated by the fact that schools are not provided with resources, including hands-on support, to analyse results, develop action plans and address weaknesses. Now that Albania has re-organised regional and local education units, the ministry should ensure that regional directorates have a clear mandate for ensuring school quality, including providing support to follow up on external school evaluations. This type of support is particularly important to ensure that schools that are struggling to meet quality standards are acting on evaluation results and have the capacity to improve.

Recommendation 4.2.1. Require follow-up to external school evaluation results

In Albania, external school evaluation results are not used to incentivise schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In addition to improving the quality of the external school evaluation process, as recommended above, Albania should require schools to follow up on evaluation results by developing action plans. Albania should also consider gradually introducing a differentiated approach to external school evaluations to focus resources and attention on schools that need the most support to improve.

Require all schools to develop an action plan in response to external school evaluations

The Quality Assurance Agency should encourage schools to act upon recommendations for improvement by requiring the development of action plans. The absence of this type of requirement represents a significant gap. In other Western Balkan countries with external school evaluation systems, such as North Macedonia and Serbia, all schools are required to develop an action plan in follow-up to an external evaluation inspection. The Quality Assurance Agency might develop a template for this purpose. The template should prompt schools to consider how actions relate to their school self-evaluations and school development plans. The Quality Assurance Agency could also provide schools with examples of good action plans to help guide their efforts. To make this a meaningful practice, principals will also need sufficient pre-service and in-service training on planning for school improvement and engaging school staff in follow-up activities (see Policy issue 4.4). Schools could discuss their action plans with regional directorate staff, who could support them in putting the actions into practice (see Recommendation 4.2.2).

Consider introducing a differentiated school evaluation cycle

Prior to its dissolution, the inspectorate selected a sample of schools for inspection based on their location (i.e. rural vs. urban) and size. It is not clear whether they tried to include schools that were underperforming in this sample. The Quality Assurance Agency and the ministry should consider gradually introducing a systematic risk-based approach to external school evaluations. This should allow Albania to closely monitor struggling schools while rewarding good schools with greater autonomy and space to innovate. An increasing number of countries have introduced differentiated approaches to external school evaluation to better support struggling schools, including the Netherlands, New Zealand, Korea and Ireland (OECD, 2013[1]). In England (United Kingdom), for

example, the central inspection agency, Ofsted, requires schools that received a "required improvement" mark during their regular inspection to undertake a new inspection two years after the original inspection (Gray, 2014[27]). Albania could introduce a similar practice:

- **Schools that receive an overall rating of "poor"** on their external school evaluation could be subject to a shorter evaluation cycle. This would incentivise schools to act on the results of their evaluations.
- **Schools that receive a ranking of "good" or "very good" on multiple rounds** of external school evaluations (e.g. two) could be subject to a longer evaluation cycle. This would encourage high-performing schools to continue to meet quality standards.

Recommendation 4.2.2. Provide stronger regional support for school improvement

Prior to 2019, the ministry's RED/EOs were supposed to follow up with schools after full school inspections to determine their progress in responding to recommendations (Gray, 2014[27]). However, representatives of these bodies told the review team that this did not happen in practice. Albania should create positions within the new regional directorates to provide greater support to schools in follow-up to external school evaluations. This support will be particularly beneficial given schools' lack of resources and limited experience developing improvement measures informed by self-evaluations (see Policy issue 4.3).

Create separate school support staff at the regional level

Albania is currently determining what profile staff in the new regional directorates should have. To ensure that they provide comprehensive support to schools, the ministry should:

- **Create dedicated school support staff within the regional directorates**. These individuals should provide schools with varying levels of support based on, among other things, the results of external school evaluations (see Recommendation 4.2.3). For example, in Wales (United Kingdom), regional education consortia employ several different types of staff, including specialists in different teaching and learning areas, and a large number of "challenge advisers" to work with school leaders to help schools improve (Welsh Government, 2014[41]).
- **Recruit highly-proficient educators to support schools.** In the short-term, specialists within the previous RED/EO curriculum and quality sectors and programme development sectors could fill these positions. In the medium-term, new school support staff could be recruited from among teachers in the higher stages of a new competency-based career structure (see Chapter 3), as well as principals with experience in successful school improvement. Over time, experience as a contracted appraiser of teachers seeking registration or promotion (see Chapter 3) or as a regional external school evaluator might be considered an asset for these positions. Specialists should be selected through merit-based job competitions involving transparent selection criteria that relate to the competencies needed for the role.
- **Provide school support staff with appropriate training for their roles.** The extent of training provided to specialists in the previous RED/EOs is unclear. However, given that RED/EO representatives met by the review team viewed their school support role as being limited to reviewing and providing advice to teachers

on their documentation, it is likely that they were not prepared to provide the kind of support described above. To ensure adequate preparation of regional school support staff, the General Directorate and the Quality Assurance Agency might, for example, provide them with opportunities to participate in training that is developed for schools on self-evaluation and improvement practices (see Policy issue 4.3). Over time, new specialists could also be mentored by more experienced specialists.

Consider creating positions for more local school support staff

Each of Albania's four regional directorates is now responsible for 12 to 16 local education offices that liaise with and conduct day-to-day monitoring of schools. Given their closer proximity to schools, the local education offices are well positioned to provide support that is responsive to schools' needs. For example, in Scotland (United Kingdom), support for schools is provided both regionally and locally, by six co-ordinating Regional Improvement Collaboratives and 32 local authorities (Scottish Government, 2017[42]). However, in Albania, local education offices have traditionally been underfunded, and staffing challenges are likely to continue, which will limit their capacity to support schools. Given these constraints, Albania might consider creating positions for school support staff who are responsible for schools across several local education offices. These could be co-ordinated by the regional directorates and provide supports like those recommended below, but located closer to schools to provide an efficient intermediate layer of support.

Recommendation 4.2.3. Target support to low-performing schools

Schools in Albania that are struggling to meet quality standards need more support to improve. Schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas have a particularly limited capacity. The government should introduce targeted technical support that is timely, flexible and adapted to schools' needs (OECD, 2013[1]), as well as targeted funding, to help these schools meaningfully respond to recommendations for improvement resulting from external school evaluations. These government initiatives are likely to be more effective if combined with school-to-school support in the form of a networking programme.

Introduce a risk-based approach to follow-up support

Albania should target follow-up support to struggling schools. This will not only help individual schools to improve but also address broader inequities in Albania's education system, like lower student outcomes among rural schools (OECD, 2016[3]). Specifically, the ministry should work with the General Directorate to introduce:

- **Intensive technical follow-up support at the regional level.** The regional school support staff described above should focus their support on schools in their area that received "poor" results on their external school evaluations. This support could take different forms. For example, support staff should help schools implement action plans in response to their external school evaluations. They could also provide supports like those offered by "challenge advisors" in Wales (United Kingdom) (see Box 4.5).
- **Targeted financial support for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.** Financial support would include central funding for the kinds of local technical support described above, as well as a school networking programme (see below) and school improvement grants (see Policy issue 4.4).

Box 4.5. Support provided by regional education consortia in Wales, United Kingdom

In Wales (United Kingdom), regional education consortia employ several different types of staff, including specialists in different teaching and learning areas, and a large number of "Challenge Advisers". The Challenge Adviser positions were created specifically to support principals to build in-school capacity to meet school quality standards. There are four main aspects to their role, set out as *National Standards for Challenge Advisers*:

1. Supporting school evaluation and improvement (e.g. supporting school leaders to conduct classroom observations and improve the quality of teaching, supporting effective target setting as part of strategic planning)
2. Arranging effective support and intervention (e.g. identify resources to address school needs, facilitate school-to-school networking)
3. Developing school leadership (e.g. mentoring, coaching and using evidence to review performance and impact)
4. Building school-to-school capacity (e.g. determining ways in which good schools can support others)

Sources: Welsh Government (2014[41]), *National Standards for Challenge Advisers*, https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/national-standards-for-challenge-advisers.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019); European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015[7]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe,* http://doi.org/10.2797/678 (accessed on 18 November 2019).

Introduce a networking programme to support school improvement

While inspectors with Albania's inspectorate may have advised schools to collaborate with other education institutions to help improve quality, this type of collaboration has not been a systematic practice. The ministry should work with the Quality Assurance Agency and the General Directorate to introduce a peer-learning network initiative that pairs schools that received a "sufficient" or "poor" rating on their external school evaluation with schools that received a rating of "very good". This type of initiative would provide school staff with opportunities to learn about each other's activities and problem-solve together, with the goal of improving the lower performing school's practices (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). The Quality Assurance Agency and the ministry would pair schools based on the results of their evaluations, while the General Directorate would ensure that regional directorates and local education offices facilitate schools' involvement in the networks. If Albania establishes this type of initiative, it could learn from Serbia's experience introducing the SHARE programme, which paired schools for peer-learning based on inspection results (see Box 4.6).

Box 4.6. Serbia's SHARE programme

The SHARE project, a joint project between UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, the Centre for Education Policy (a research centre in Belgrade) and Serbia's Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE), is the first initiative in Serbia aiming to create learning communities and peer-learning between schools. SHARE aims to improve the quality of education by developing horizontal learning between schools and developing schools' and teachers' agency to learn and lead change in the education system. The

initial phase of the project took place between 2015 and 2017, with 20 schools, 1 080 teachers and 12 665 students participating across Serbia. The project paired 10 schools that performed very well in the external school evaluation (score of 4), known as "model schools", with 10 schools that performed weakly (score of 2 or 1), known as "SHARE schools".

The project used a reflective approach combining classroom observation and feedback on observed practice. Following the selection of participating schools, classroom visitations were planned to support reflective practice. During this step, teachers, school principals and support staff from the SHARE schools observed between 10 to 15 hours of teaching at the model schools.

Based on a pairing system, the majority of discussions between schools focused on classroom management, lesson planning, teaching techniques, student support, teamwork and preparing for external evaluation. To give constructive feedback during these peer-to-peer sessions, staff in the model schools received training on how to articulate, document and share their success with their paired schools. During the final school visits, SHARE schools were also given the opportunity to present their experience and examples of best practices, thus motivating self-reflection.

The SHARE project initiated and established mutual exchange of knowledge and best practices between schools. It provided schools with hands-on experience through its peer-to-peer-learning component. In addition, as a way to enhance the sustainability and long-term benefits of the project, a learning portal was created and shared amongst educators in Serbia. Moreover, 100 practitioners were trained to provide support for quality improvement in low-performing schools, creating a network of facilitators who have been integrated into the ministry of education as educational advisors linked to school administrations around the country.

The first phase of the project had a positive impact on the 20 participating schools and show scope for growth and scaling up. A majority of participating schools have seen an improvement in six out of seven areas of quality measured by the external school evaluation. This improvement was mostly seen in the areas of teaching and learning, school ethos and organisation of work and leadership. More broadly, the project introduced participating staff to the concept of horizontal learning and encouraged teachers to work together without the fear of being judged by their peers. It also allowed them to practice new teaching methods and play a more active role in shaping their classroom and school practices.

Source: UNICEF (n.d.[43]), *Dare to Share: Empowering Teachers to be the Change in the Classroom*; European Commission (2017[44]), *Networks for Learning and Development across School Education*, https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/downloads/Governance/2018-wgs5-networks-learning_en.pdf (accessed on 10 June 2019).

Policy issue 4.3. Helping schools conduct self-evaluation for improvement

In Albania, schools conduct self-evaluations once a year, but they view this as an administrative task with limited benefit. They do not consistently use results to inform improvements as part of the school development planning cycle.

Full school inspections have found that objectives for development are not based on the actual situation in the school (AQAPUE, 2017[26]). Schools also lack capacity to analyse their self-evaluation findings (MoESY, 2014[20]). To address these limitations, Albania needs to develop training to help schools conduct effective self-evaluations and offer guidance on how to integrate self-evaluation and development planning efforts. Schools also need practical tools and relevant data so that they can accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses. The school performance card, if revised, could provide a useful tool to help schools conduct meaningful self-evaluations based on relevant data.

Recommendation 4.3.1. Help schools integrate school self-evaluation into the school development planning process

In Albania, schools' priorities for development are not consistently informed by an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. As recommended above, making school self-evaluation for improvement a core school evaluation indicator that is assessed in every external school evaluation will underline the importance of the relationship between school self-evaluation and development planning. Albania should also consider conducting research with schools on this topic and ensure that school self-evaluation and development planning are both led by the principal.

Conduct a review of schools' self-evaluation experiences

The Quality Assurance Agency should conduct a review to gather input from schools about their self-evaluation experiences. This review should include enquiries about why schools might be having difficulty incorporating self-evaluation results into their school development planning process. Information gathered in this review could be used to inform changes to the self-evaluation or school development planning processes, as well as the development of self-evaluation resources and training for schools (see below).

Clarify the principal's role in school self-evaluation

Effective school self-evaluation relies on strong school leadership (SICI, 2003[4]). Principals need to be able to drive staff to engage in regular school self-evaluation activities, support them in implementing best practices for school self-evaluation and use results to inform school improvement goals. In Albania, while the principal plays a key role in defining school goals by leading school development planning, their role in school self-evaluation is more ambiguous. The inspectorate's *Methodology Guidelines for External and Internal School Evaluation* state that the principal should act as a coordinator, supporter and monitor of self-evaluation but that they should not intervene in the process because their involvement could affect the outcome. The review team's interviews with school staff suggested that, in practice, some schools view self-evaluation as falling outside of the principal's mandate. To address this, Albania should:

- **Clarify that principals should be directly involved in the school self-evaluation teams' main activities.** The Quality Assurance Agency and the ministry should clarify, in guidelines and all relevant policy documents, that principals should always belong to the school's self-evaluation team and contribute to its core activities, including making plans to act on self-evaluation results.
- **Ensure that new school leadership standards are used to reinforce principals' role in school self-evaluation**. The School of Directors should ensure that Albania's school leadership standards, which are being reviewed and revised, are used to support the principal's role in leading school self-evaluation. For example, the standards should be built into procedures for principal certification, recruitment, appraisal and training (see Policy issue 4.4). The current standards already cover important managerial and instructional leadership areas that are common to school leadership standards across OECD countries, including school self-evaluation (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). However, they are not used consistently and so their view of principals as instructional leaders has not permeated the education system.

Recommendation 4.3.2. Build capacity for school self-evaluation

School staff in Albania do not receive any training on school self-evaluation. They also receive few resources to support their implementation of the process. While the inspectorate provided schools with guidelines containing the school evaluation framework and describing the school evaluation methodology, these lacked information about effective practices and tools schools could use to support their self-evaluations. For-example, a significant proportion of the methodology guidelines focused on the external school evaluation process.

Revise the school self-evaluation guidelines and provide practical self-evaluation tools

To support effective self-evaluation, research recommends that schools be provided with self-evaluation resources and tools and descriptions of schools' effective practices in using them (OECD, 2013[1]). The Quality Assurance Agency should:

- **Revise the school self-evaluation guidelines to help schools focus on key areas for development.** Stakeholders told the review team that the Quality Assurance Agency is already working on revising the guidelines. These should provide an overview of the steps in the self-evaluation process and help schools focus their evaluations specifically on the areas that are known to impact students' learning and development. One way to do this is by including a few simple questions about how schools are doing in relation to key quality indicators (e.g. How good is learning and teaching in our school? How good are we at ensuring student well-being and inclusion?) (Riley and Macbeath, 2000[45]). The guidelines should contain a small number of core evaluation indicators that are most important to school quality, drawn from the framework identified in Policy issue 4.1. Similar to what is currently included in the school evaluation framework, the guidelines should provide schools with descriptors and benchmarks for each indicator to help them make judgements about their practices.
- **Share self-evaluation tools and effective practices.** The Quality Assurance Agency should consider developing an online platform so that schools can share self-evaluation tools and successful self-evaluation practices. This would be similar to the School Self-evaluation website developed by Ireland's Department of Education and Skills. This website offers schools resources that include evidence-gathering tools (e.g. sample interviews and questionnaires), videos of school self-evaluation seminars, examples of schools' self-evaluation products, and detailed descriptions of how certain schools conducted their self-evaluations (Department of Education and Skills of Ireland, 2019[46]). The Quality Assurance Agency could solicit these resources from schools and also use external school evaluations as opportunities to collect them. The platform could also be designed to allow schools to communicate and seek advice from each other.

Provide training to school staff responsible for school self-evaluation

Most OECD countries invest in training school staff on school self-evaluation, particularly to develop their understanding of the process when it is first introduced as a requirement (OECD, 2013[1]). By contrast, in Albania, school staff have not received any training on how to conduct self-evaluations. To build schools' capacity to conduct effective self-evaluations, Albania should:

- **Develop mandatory school self-evaluation training for principals.** Principals are commonly provided with training on school self-evaluation in OECD and European countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). As recommended above, Albania's revised school leadership standards should identify school self-evaluation as a core school leadership responsibility, and the standards should be used to inform the development of training for principals. The School of Directors should work with the Quality Assurance Agency to ensure that school self-evaluation is covered in the new training modules for school leaders.
- **Provide regular training for school staff responsible for school self-evaluation.** The Quality Assurance Agency should develop this training. It should cover key areas such as how to gather evidence (e.g. using classroom observations, interviews and questionnaires), how to analyse data and how to develop school improvement plans (OECD, 2013[1]). Internationally, this type of training tends to take the form of seminars, workshops or online modules (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). The ministry should provide funding so that all schools that obtain poor results on their external school evaluations can participate in this training.
- **Offer external support for school self-evaluation.** In over half of European countries with school self-evaluation, including countries like Belgium (German-speaking community), Estonia, Poland and schools can request self-evaluation advice and support from external specialists free of charge (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015[7]). Specialists are frequently public sector employees, and they commonly offer guidance and training on how to improve schools' self-evaluation processes, which data collection tools to use, and how to develop and act on findings and work towards goals for improvement. In Albania, each regional directorate could include staff members who have the capacity to provide external self-evaluation support to schools, as is the practice in Wales (United Kingdom). These could be the same regional or local school support staff described in Policy issue 4.2. Schools that are struggling with school self-evaluation and development planning, as evidenced by external school evaluation results, should be required to receive this type of coaching.

Recommendation 4.3.3. Support schools to make better use of data

Schools in Albania require better data to inform their self-evaluation and improvement activities. This includes detailed data on student learning outcomes, as well as more relevant data on schools' performance in relation to key teaching and learning measures and contextual factors. The school performance card could provide a valuable source of data to support schools' development. However, at present, it is primarily used as an accountability tool to rank schools. This ranking of schools within a local education area regardless of schools' differing characteristics presents an unfair comparison of school performance. Albania should, instead, reduce the stakes associated with the school performance card and build trust in the instrument as a developmental tool.

Provide granular data from standardised tests to support school self-evaluation

The Educational Services Centre (ESC) should provide schools with granular data on their students' results on national exams and assessments (see Chapter 5). This will support schools' self-evaluations by allowing staff to compare the results of their students against comparable groups in other schools, regionally and nationally. It will also help teachers evaluate their own instructional practices and make adjustments to support student learning.

Transform the school performance card into an internal school self-evaluation tool

To encourage schools to use data in the school performance card for their own self-evaluation and development:

- The ministry should stop using school performance cards to rank schools and making the cards public. Rather, the school performance card should become an internal tool for schools.
- The Quality Assurance Agency should provide schools with electronic templates pre-filled with national and, where relevant, regional benchmarks to which schools can add their own data.

Review and revise the indicators included in the school performance card

The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should revise the school performance card indicators to ensure that they reliably cover key measures of teaching and learning in Albania's schools. This will require working closely with the General Directorate and the ESC, which is responsible for national exams and assessments, to improve the quality and comparability of the data. The ministry and the Quality Assurance Agency should also ensure that national and regional indicators are relevant to school quality and reflect contextual factors that impact performance. The ministry should:

- **Improve external measures of student learning.** The school performance card already includes key measures of student learning that are comparable nationally, such as results on the State Matura Exam. The card also includes results from the National Basic Education Examination; however, these results are not comparable nationally (see Chapter 2). The ministry should ensure the school performance card and its users avoid using data from the National Basic Education Exam to draw comparisons between schools until the exam's reliability has been improved. The ministry should also include the VANAF and the new Grade 3 national assessment as measures of learning, once the reliability of the former at national level has been improved and once the latter is implemented (see Chapter 5).
- **Remove indicators that do not capture the main goal of providing quality education for all students.** Some of the indicators currently included in the school performance card do not capture the key factors related to improving teaching and learning in schools or contradict the fundamental principle of quality education for all students. These indicators should be removed and replaced with better indicators of quality. For example, the national indicator on the number of continuous professional development credits teachers obtain should be removed, since accruing credits, regardless of the topic of training, is not an indicator of school quality. National and regional indicators on the number of awards at Olympiads and similar competitions should also be removed as they promote a narrow focus on top performers rather than all students.
- **Include contextual indicators.** The school performance card should also include some key contextual indicators to better interpret school results and take into account factors outside of schools' control. Contextual indicators that impact student learning include factors such as language spoken at home and the median income of parents or other available data on students' socio-economic background. The latter would be similar to the social aspect indicators schools are already required to include in their development plans (e.g. the number of students from

families receiving economic aid). The school's geographic context (rural vs. urban), the number of shifts and whether the school has multi-grade classes are also important pieces of information to better interpret the results.

Streamline data reporting and develop a data portal for schools

Once the ministry and ESC have further developed the EMIS, most of the indicators in the school performance card should be filled automatically from the EMIS system. This will help reduce the reporting burden on schools. As they are developing the EMIS system, the ministry and ESC should also build a school portal or "view" that automatically provides the school with its performance data compared to benchmarks (see Chapter 5). This new dashboard would replace the school performance card. The dashboard should provide schools with:

- **Meaningful benchmarks with comparable schools.** The dashboard should allow schools that share contextual features that are closely associated with student achievement, notably the socio-economic background of the student population, to compare their performance. This will reveal whether schools with similar backgrounds are obtaining different outcomes. For example, Australia nationally benchmarks like schools based on students' national assessment results. (ACARA, 2019[47]).
- **Trends over time for each school quality indicator.** This will support school improvement by incentivising schools to show progress and encouraging low-performing schools to keep working towards improvement.

Policy issue 4.4. Supporting school-level capacity for improvement

Chronic underfunding of schools is among the main hurdles preventing schools from using information from external and internal school evaluations to improve their practices. Schools in Albania lack funding that meets their basic needs so they are not in a position to follow through on the results of their self-evaluations and improve the quality of their practices. For example, schools not only lack funding for staff development to improve teaching practices but also basic necessities like heating. Albania needs to address these funding challenges to help schools improve.

Limited in-school capacity to plan and implement meaningful improvements represents an additional challenge. Principals in Albania have historically lacked the capacity to make improvements to teaching and learning practices in their schools. Their role has been primarily administrative. A high turnover rate and a career progression process that rewards principals for teaching rather than leadership have inhibited principals from developing competencies as school leaders. With the establishment of the School of Directors, Albania should focus first on ensuring that pre-service training for principals effectively prepares them to act as instructional leaders and that principals have the time to devote to school leadership responsibilities. Albania should also encourage and reward principals for developing their effectiveness through a new leadership track in the teacher career structure.

Recommendation 4.4.1. Provide schools with sufficient financial resources, including school improvement funding

Education funding in Albania is relatively low as a percentage of GDP compared to levels in neighbouring countries (UIS, 2020[48]). This leads to chronic underfunding of schools, with many schools not receiving enough funds to cover their basic infrastructure and operational needs (Gjokutaj, 2013[17]). Schools' capacity to provide instruction is hindered

by a lack of education material (i.e. textbooks, IT equipment, and library or laboratory material) (OECD, 2016[3]). This puts schools under pressure to look for other sources of funding. In one school visited by the review team, parents were raising funds to cover the cost of heaters. In addition, funds are not distributed equitably (see Chapter 1). While underfunding constrains all schools' ability to put in place improvement measures, funding disparities mean that schools that need the most support, like those in rural areas, may be at an even greater disadvantage. Albania needs to make changes to how schools are funded to ensure greater equity. Discretionary grants should also be used to help disadvantaged schools work towards improvement.

Ensure that funding is distributed equitably to all schools

The central funding that regional directorates and local education offices use to cover the majority of schools' expenses (e.g. teacher salaries, textbooks) is not based on a funding formula that takes into account the particular contexts of the local area or schools. At the same time, funding for school building maintenance and recurring costs (e.g. water, electricity, heating) is not sufficient to meet schools' needs. School staff told the review team that poor infrastructure was a significant impediment to improved teaching and learning. This funding is provided separately by municipalities, derived locally and from central transfers, and through competitive government grants.

To address these issues, Albania should:

- **Introduce a weighted school funding formula for educational services**. The government should introduce a funding formula for transfers to regional directorates and their local education offices to cover school budgets within their area. This formula should take into account contextual variables to meet the needs of schools. These should include the number of students per school and the school's socio-economic context, as well as characteristics of the student population. For example, in Belgium (Flemish and French communities), state authorities distribute resources to schools according to a per-student funding formula that takes into account school characteristics (i.e. location and size) and student characteristics (i.e. socio-economic status and the number of students with special education needs), as well as a range of variables related to the school curriculum (e.g. the level and type of education) (OECD, 2017[49]). The ministry should require that regional directorates and local education offices use this formula when distributing funds to schools.
- **Ensure that funding is available to cover schools' infrastructure needs**. The central government should work with municipalities to review the process for financing these costs to identify where improvements can be made. The government should also determine whether changes should be made to the competitive grants that are intended to address schools' infrastructure needs. This should help prevent funds for instructional improvement being diverted to fund basic material needs.

Provide targeted funding to schools for school improvement

Schools in Albania, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, do not have the funds to follow through on their school improvement plans. While all schools were granted approval to open bank accounts in 2018, they will only be in charge of the funds they can raise from parents and private donors. It is unlikely that schools in lower socio-economic areas will be able to raise the funds they need to implement development plan activities. The ministry should consider introducing discretionary school improvement grants that schools can use

to implement these activities. This could be a part of the school competition for a national fund that the ministry is reportedly developing or a separate initiative. In distributing these grants, the ministry should give priority to schools that have received poor results on their full school inspections and base their decisions on factors like schools' location or socio-economic status. An international example of this type of grant is the Pupil Premium in England (United Kingdom) (see Box 4.7). The Quality Assurance Agency could work with their regional school evaluators to conduct a thematic inspection of the use of the grants once they are fully in place, and disseminate effective practices gathered from the inspection. School principals would be the key decision-makers regarding the most appropriate use of the grants. This means that they would need training on how to manage the funds effectively (see Recommendation 4.4.2).

Box 4.7. Pupil premium in England, United Kingdom

In England (United Kingdom), the Department for Education has established an additional funding scheme (Pupil Premium) provided to schools serving disadvantaged students. Pupil Premium funds are provided on a per-student basis and schools have autonomy on how these resources are spent. Schools are expected to spend these resources on strategies that better support learning for disadvantaged students and close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students. Since 2012, schools are required to publish online information about how the Pupil Premium is used and the interventions they are implementing to address the needs of disadvantaged students as well as the impact they are having.

Schools receiving the Pupil Premium are required to monitor and report achievement of all students and to report achievement specifically of disadvantaged students. Ofsted, the English inspection agency, monitors closely the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students and how schools are addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. If the inspection identifies issues regarding the provision for disadvantaged students, then a more thorough review (the pupil premium review) is conducted. The purpose of this review is to help schools to improve their pupil premium strategy so that they "spend funding on approaches shown to be effective in improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils". The Department for Education uses information reported by schools to highlight and reward those schools reaching good results for disadvantaged students.

Sources: OECD (2017[49]), *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276147-en.

Recommendation 4.4.2. Develop the role of the principal as instructional leader

Until now, the principal and teacher roles in Albania have not been as distinct as they are in other countries. For example, principals in Albania are still appraised for a salary increase as part of the teacher career structure, they maintain a teaching workload, and they return to teaching after short periods as school leaders. Albania's principals have also lacked consistent pre-service training and continuous professional development focused on the school leadership role. Principals need sufficient preparation and training, particularly on instructional leadership, to develop competencies to lead improvements to teaching and learning in their schools. A lack of training can also limit the impact of national education policies since principals who are not well-prepared and supported are not as effective at applying these policies in schools (Vaillant, 2014[50]).

Albania is poised to create a new vision for the role of the principal with the establishment of the School of Directors. Developing a cadre of strong school leaders who are capable of improving school quality is a long-term investment. As a priority, the School of Directors

should ensure that new pre-service training for principals is of high quality and develops both instructional leadership and managerial capacity. Another priority should be freeing up principals' time for their school leadership responsibilities. To attract qualified candidates to the profession and ensure that they are encouraged and rewarded for developing their leadership effectiveness, Albania should also introduce processes to completely de-politicise principal appointment and dismissal decisions, and create career opportunities within a leadership track of the teacher career structure. A more formative annual appraisal process and collaborative, job-embedded professional learning opportunities will also help principals develop their leadership skills.

Develop pre-service training that addresses instructional leadership

The new pre-service training for principals, which will be mandatory for school leader certification, is now being delivered by universities as a pilot, initially to principals already in the role. The School of Directors should ensure that the training:

- **Covers instructional leadership,** as well as all other essential areas of school leadership identified in revised school leadership standards, as recommended above (see Policy issue 4.3). Important instructional leadership areas include taking ownership of school self-evaluation, planning and leading school improvements, and guiding and supporting teachers to improve their delivery of the pre-tertiary curriculum.
- **Includes opportunities for practical preparation**. Practical training is increasingly a central feature of pre-service training for school principals across OECD countries. For example, mandatory pre-service training in Israel includes an internship (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). Albania should pay particular attention to this given that universities are delivering the training. Internationally, some programmes delivered by higher education institutions have been considered too theoretical (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).
- **Is of sufficient length**. The School of Directors should use the pilot to review whether the nine months of training on weekends is long enough to address all essential areas of instructional and managerial leadership. Pre-service training programmes for school leaders in OECD countries commonly last for two years part-time, or between 12 to 18 months (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).
- **Is free of charge or subsidised.** When the training is initially provided to principals already in the role as a requirement for maintaining their position, it should be given free-of-charge. When it is offered more widely as a certification requirement, Albania should consider funding universities to deliver the training free-of-charge or covering the majority of the costs to attract more educators to become principals. For example, in Slovenia, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), and Austria, educators who aspire to become principals do not have to pay for pre-service training, while in Israel and New Zealand, participants share the cost with another entity (e.g. a level of government or the provider) (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).

The School of Directors should also ensure that the certification exam that is undertaken at the end of the pre-service training assesses principals' management and leadership skills. These skills can be tested through case studies in which school principals demonstrate their capacity to use information about the school to develop an improvement plan.

Abolish principals' teaching load

Devoting a considerable amount of worktime to teaching prevents principals in Albania from effectively delivering on their managerial and instructional leadership responsibilities. The ministry is considering eliminating the requirement that principals maintain a teaching workload. The review team strongly supports this change.

Introduce a leadership track that encourages competency development

Albania is having difficulty attracting teachers to become principals and retaining them in the profession. Some structural factors such as the teaching load discussed above and the lack of clear differentiation between the principal and teacher career structure have heavily limited the development of a professional core of school principals in Albania. Principals can only obtain performance-based salary increases as teachers. There has historically been no system to motivate them to develop their competencies as school leaders. Teacher leaders (i.e. subject team heads), who are potential future school leaders, are not provided with opportunities to develop their leadership competencies. To address these issues, the ministry, School of Directors and other key partners should introduce a career track for school leaders. To do so, they should consider:

- **Identifying levels and roles for the leadership track**. Albania lacks a formal system to support the identification and development of teachers with leadership potential to become school leaders. The ministry should create a competency-based pathway into school leadership. Albania could begin its leadership track with levels for "intermediate leaders" who are subject team heads, professional network managers and all teachers at level 3 or above on the teacher career structure who aspire to school leadership (see Chapter 3). The leadership track would then include deputy principals and principals.

- **Developing career levels for school leaders**. Albania currently lacks a mechanism to encourage continuous leadership development among principals and to reward their performance in a way that relates to leadership rather than teaching. Developing competency-based career levels for the principal role that are associated with salary increases would support this, and could also help Albania recruit more teachers to the principal role by making it more attractive (OECD, 2019[51]). Albania might consider developing levels for the school leadership role, progressing from newly appointed to experienced. Albania could look to the Czech Republic as an example of a country that has established a similar structure (see Box 4.8). The ministry should also revise the school principal standards to define the competencies associated with each level in the career track.

- **Creating a path from school leader to system leadership**. The ministry might also consider extending the leadership track to include system leaders. Requirements for local or regional leadership roles such as director of a local education office do not take into account leadership experience. Including system leadership as the highest level of the leadership track and selecting only the most effective school leaders to take on these roles would contribute to the overall improvement of the education system (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). This type of leadership track, encompassing teacher leaders, school leaders and system leaders is similar to the model established in Singapore (see Chapter 3).

Box 4.8. The proposed career structure for school leadership in Czech Republic

In 2015, the National Institute for Further Education (NIDV) in Czech Republic developed a proposal for a new career system for school principals *(kariérní systém pro ředitele)*. The Institute suggested a system with career stages that ranged from 0 to 3 and would be based on standards. Under this structure, teachers interested in becoming principals would be at stage 0. Newly appointed principals would be at stage 1, during which they would undergo a two-year induction phase and a post-induction phase in order to support their leadership development. Stage 2 would be for principals who have successfully completed the induction and post-induction phases. Stage 3 would be for system leaders.

Source: Shewbridge et al. (2016[52]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Czech Republic 2016*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262379-en.

Develop collaborative professional learning opportunities for school leaders

Research recommends providing principals with collaborative, job-embedded learning opportunities, including induction programmes that involve mentorship, and networking (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]). Albania should consider introducing:

- **School leadership networks.** Albania could build on progress made in establishing professional learning networks for educators (see Chapter 3) by developing local networks specifically for school leaders. The School of Directors and local education offices would need to provide support and guidance to help these networks function as effective professional learning communities. An example of this type of school leadership network can be found in Sweden where, in each municipality, a director of education responsible for developing principals organises regular network meetings with principals. These meetings are used for coaching, problem solving and testing new ideas (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).
- **A principal mentorship programme.** Albania could likewise build on the country's tradition of teacher mentorship by developing a programme in which experienced principals mentor new principals. The ministry and School of Directors would need to ensure that mentors receive adequate recognition and training for their role. In Estonia, for example, coaches are selected from among school principals with at least five years of experience. They need to demonstrate high levels of motivation and pass a mandatory training course on communication, needs analysis, coaching and feedback (Education and Training 2020 Working Group, 2017[53]).

Use revised principal appraisal processes for formative and summative purposes

The appraisal of principals does not occur on a consistent basis and it does not support school leaders' ongoing development. For example, it does not inform decisions about professional learning opportunities that would meet principals' needs. Appraisal results also do not inform dismissal decisions. There are ongoing concerns that these decisions are influenced by politics. In addition, Albania lacks an appraisal for promotion process that assesses principals based on their school leadership work. Instead, principals are appraised for a higher qualification category and salary increase solely based on their work as teachers. The ministry and the School of Directors are currently working on revising the appraisal of principals. To address these issues, they should:

- **Introduce a periodic school leadership appraisal process to inform mandate renewal and career decisions.** To ensure that these decisions are fair and free from political influence, the ministry and the School of Directors should shift responsibility for appraisal from local education office directors to independent evaluators. Given that the School of Directors will only have 10 staff members, which is not sufficient to conduct appraisals nation-wide, some regional school evaluators with the Quality Assurance Agency could take on this additional responsibility. In Israel, for example, school leader appraisals that inform decisions about employment status and career progression are conducted every three years by inspectors who belong to an independent agency (OECD, 2013[1]). The School of Directors will need to develop appraisal guidelines based on the revised school leadership standards and work with the Quality Assurance Agency to train inspectors. The training could cover things like how to effectively use appraisal instruments and how to communicate with school leaders (Piggot-Irvine, 2003[54]).
- **Introduce an annual appraisal of principals for formative purposes.** The ministry and School of Directors should also develop a separate regular appraisal process for principals. It could be structured around an annual performance review period to ensure maximum support. As with the current appraisal process, it could be conducted by the local education office director or their designate (e.g. a specialist within the programme development sector). The primary outcomes of this process would be the identification of relevant professional learning activities and constructive feedback for school leaders. These are key appraisal outcomes intended to build school leaders' competencies (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).
- **Use the appraisal processes to respond to underperformance and inform dismissal decisions.** Decisions to dismiss principals are not always made transparently in Albania. In addition, regulations allow for principals to be removed from their position for poor school or student performance (e.g. average scores on the State Matura Examination for three years are lower than the previous two years). This risks penalizing principals for factors that influence school and student outcomes that are beyond their control, such as lack of funding, rather than their own performance. Local education offices and school boards should, instead, use appraisal results or external school evaluation results to justify the removal of a principal. Dismissal decisions should be preceded by measures that are commonly used internationally to give principals opportunities to change their practices, including the development and implementation of improvement plans, and further evaluation (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).

Provide guidelines for appointment commissions and consider enhancing their authority

Despite progress, there continues to be mistrust among school actors about the integrity of the appointment process of school principals. New rigorous requirements to become a principal and new appraisal processes should help to make their initial appointment and ongoing employment more merit-based. Albania should also make the following changes to help ensure that appointment decisions are based on relevant assessments of candidates and free from political influence:

- **Develop guidelines to help appointment commissions assess candidates against the revised principal standards.** The School of Directors should develop these to ensure that principals are judged based on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are key to school leadership in Albania. In Victoria (Australia), for example, selection panels are given detailed guidelines outlining the most important selection criteria and explaining steps to prepare for and conduct interviews (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[21]).
- **Consider altering who makes the appointment decision.** The ministry could consider making appointment decisions the result of a majority vote by the appointment commission rather than solely the decision of the director of the regional directorate. The ministry could also involve additional external expertise on the selection committee, such as a regional school evaluator with the Quality Assurance Agency. For example, in the Slovak Republic, an inspector from the State Schools Inspectorate sits on each principal selection committee to provide an objective, external perspective, and some school boards select a principal for appointment based on a confidential vote for their preferred candidate (Santiago et al., 2016[55]).

Incentivise school leaders to work in struggling schools

Schools in rural or socio-economically disadvantaged areas are generally most in need of a strong school leader to improve teaching and learning practices, but these schools are also among the hardest to staff. A 2014 research study of deputy principals in Albania found that relocation in a rural area was a disincentive to becoming a principal (Çobaj, 2015[11]). The salary scale may be one factor that makes school leadership less attractive in rural areas. Principals' salaries are differentiated according to the size of the school. This means that leaders of smaller schools, which are predominantly in rural areas, have lower starting salaries.

The ministry, in partnership with the School of Directors, should consider introducing measures to incentivise talented school leaders to work in harder-to-staff areas. These could include financial and non-financial incentives, as recommended for teachers in Chapter 3. For example, Chile and Colombia offer a higher base salary to principals in disadvantaged or remote schools, and Kazakhstan provides an allowance and housing support to principals in rural schools (OECD, 2019[51]). Non-financial incentives could include things such as national recognition for outstanding school leadership in different regions.

Table of recommendations

Policy issue	Recommendations	Actions
4.1. Consolidating responsibility for an independent external school evaluation system focused on school quality	4.1.1. Ensure the integrity of external school evaluations	Make the Quality Assurance Agency the sole authority responsible for external school evaluation
		Recruit and contract new regional external school evaluators
		Provide evaluators with appropriate training for their role
		Ensure evaluators conduct their responsibilities with integrity
	4.1.2. Review and revise the school evaluation framework	Focus inspections on core indicators of school quality
		Develop a national vision of a good school
		Use the education management information system to collect data for evaluations as soon as possible
4.2. Ensuring that external evaluations support school improvement	4.2.1. Require follow-up to external school evaluation results	Require all schools to develop an action plan in response to external school evaluations
		Consider introducing a differentiated school evaluation cycle
	4.2.2. Provide stronger regional support for school improvement	Create separate school support staff at the regional level
		Consider creating positions for more local school support staff
	4.2.3. Target support to low-performing schools	Introduce a risk-based approach to follow-up support
		Introduce a networking programme to support school improvement
4.3. Helping schools conduct self-evaluation for improvement	4.3.1. Help schools integrate school self-evaluation into the school development planning process	Conduct a review of schools' self-evaluation experiences
		Clarify the principal's role in school self-evaluation
	4.3.2. Build capacity for school self-evaluation	Revise the school self-evaluation guidelines and provide practical self-evaluation tools
		Provide training to school staff responsible for school self-evaluation
	4.3.3. Support schools to make better use of data	Provide granular data from standardized tests to support school self-evaluation
		Transform the school performance card into an internal school self-evaluation tool
		Review and revise the indicators included in the school performance card
		Streamline data reporting and develop a data portal for schools
4.4: Supporting school-level capacity for improvement	4.4.1. Provide schools with sufficient financial resources, including school improvement funding	Ensure that funding is distributed equitably to all schools
		Provide targeted funding to schools for school improvement
	4.4.2. Develop the role of the principal as instructional leader	Develop pre-service training that addresses instructional leadership
		Abolish principals' teaching load
		Introduce a leadership track that encourages competency development
		Develop collaborative professional learning opportunities for school leaders
		Use revised principal appraisal processes for formative and summative purposes
		Provide guidelines for appointment commissions and consider enhancing their authority
		Incentivise school leaders to work in struggling schools

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Chapter 5. Strengthening capacity to evaluate system performance

Albania has started to establish some of the components integral to system evaluation, including the development of a modern education management information system (EMIS). However, the lack of processes and capacity needed to conduct system evaluation, as well as low government demand for evidence, limits Albania's ability to use evaluation information for system improvement. This chapter recommends that Albania integrate evaluation more centrally into the new national education strategy and strengthen the institutional capacity needed to support a culture of system evaluation. This chapter also reviews Albania's national assessment system and EMIS development plans, offering recommendations to ensure these tools support strategic planning and national education goals.

Introduction

System evaluation is central to improving educational performance. Evaluating an education system holds the government and other stakeholders accountable for meeting national goals and provides the information needed to develop effective policies. Albania has started to establish some of the components integral to system evaluation (Table 5.1). For example, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) has tasked its longstanding statistics sector and the newly established Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency), with monitoring education system performance. The Educational Services Centre (ESC) is also working to integrate various databases and develop a modern education management information system (EMIS), called Socrates, which by 2020 will store information related to students, teachers, curriculum and schools in pre-tertiary education. Nevertheless, progress towards improving system evaluation in Albania is uneven and the government demand for evidence that could help inform education policy is generally low. As a result, Albania lacks the impetus to address capacity constraints and further develop the tools needed for comprehensive system evaluation.

This chapter suggests several measures that Albania can take to develop stronger capacity for conducting system evaluation and better co-ordinate the actors who contribute to this process. Since system evaluation relies on high-quality evaluation tools, data collection and management is one area of focus within this chapter. Without timely and trustworthy data, actors will not have a clear understanding of what is happening in the education system and where improvements should be made. Strengthening the national assessment system will be crucial to providing more reliable data that can help monitor educational progress and provide formative information for educational improvement. Taken together, these investments in system evaluation will support strategic planning and help Albania achieve national education goals.

Key features of effective system evaluation

System evaluation refers to the processes that countries use to monitor and evaluate the performance of their education systems (OECD, 2013[1]). A strong evaluation system serves two main functions: to hold the education system, and the actors within it, accountable for achieving their stated objectives; and, by generating and using evaluation information in the policy-making process, to improve policies and ultimately education outcomes (see Table 5.1). System evaluation has gained increasing importance in recent decades across the public sector, in part because of growing pressure on governments to demonstrate the results of public investment and improve efficiency and effectiveness (Schick, 2003[2]).

In the education sector, countries use information from a range of sources to monitor and evaluate quality and track progress towards national objectives (see Table 5.1). As well as collecting rich data, education systems also require "feedback loops" so that information is fed back into the policy-making process (OECD, 2017[3]). This ensures goals and policies are informed by evidence, helping to create an open and continuous cycle of organisational learning. At the same time, in order to provide public accountability, governments need to set clear responsibilities – to determine which actors should be accountable and for what – and make information available in timely and relevant forms for public debate and scrutiny. All of this constitutes a significant task, which is why effective system evaluation requires central government to work across wider networks (Burns and Köster, 2016[4]). In many

OECD countries, independent government agencies such as national audit offices, evaluation agencies, the research community and sub-national governments, play a key role in generating and exploiting available information.

A national vision and goals provide standards for system evaluation

Like other aspects of evaluation, system evaluation must be anchored in a national vision and/or goals, which provide the standards against which performance can be evaluated. In many countries, these are set out in an education strategy that spans several years. An important complement to a national vision and goals are targets and indicators. Indicators are the quantitative or qualitative variables that help to monitor progress (The World Bank, 2004[5]). Indicator frameworks combine inputs like government spending, outputs like teacher recruitment, and outcomes like student learning. While outcomes are notoriously difficult to measure, they are a feature of frameworks in most OECD countries because they measure the final results that a system is trying to achieve (OECD, 2009[6]). Goals also need to balance the outcomes a system wants to achieve, with indicators for the internal processes and capacity throughout the system that are required to achieve these outcomes (Kaplan, R.S. and D.P. Norton, 1992[7]).

Reporting against national goals supports accountability

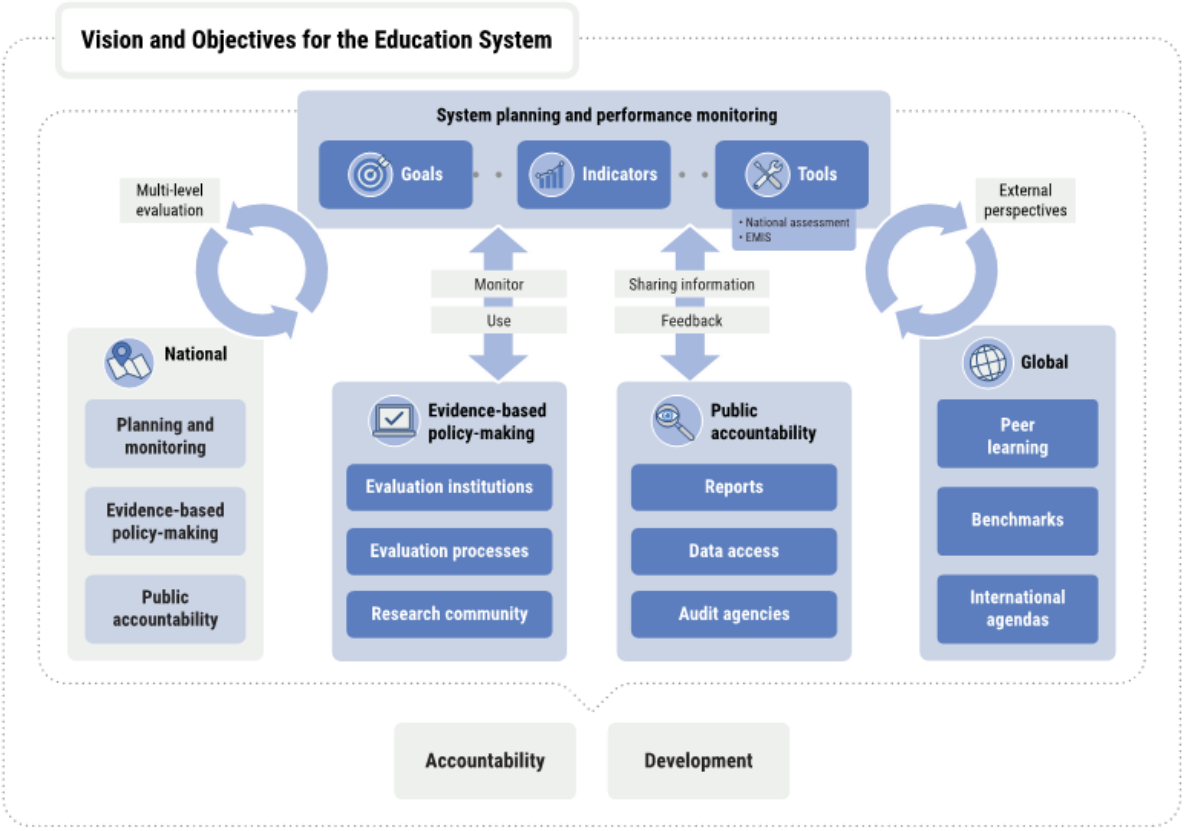
Public reporting of progress against national goals enables the public to hold government accountable. However, the public frequently lacks the time and information to undertake this role, and tends to be driven by individual or constituency interests rather than broad national concerns (House of Commons, 2011[8]). This means that objective and expert bodies like national auditing bodies, parliamentary committees and the research community play a vital role in digesting government reporting and helping to hold the government to account.

An important vehicle for public reporting is an annual report on the education system (OECD, 2013[1]). In many OECD countries, such a report is now complemented by open data. If open data is to support accountability and transparency, it must be useful and accessible. Many OECD countries use simple infographics to present complex information in a format that the general public can understand. Open data should also be provided in a form that is re-usable, i.e. other users can download and use it in different ways, so that the wider evaluation community like researchers and non-governmental bodies can analyse data to generate new insights (OECD, 2018[9]).

National goals are a strong lever for governments to direct the education system

Governments can use national goals to give coherent direction to education reform across central government, sub-national governance bodies and individual schools. For this to happen, goals should be specific, measurable, feasible and above all, relevant to the education system. Having a clear sense of direction is particularly important in the education sector, given the scale, multiplicity of actors and the difficulty in retaining focus in the long-term process of achieving change. In an education system that is well-aligned, national goals are embedded centrally in key reference frameworks, encouraging all actors to work towards their achievement. For example, national goals that all students reach minimum achievement standards or that teaching and learning foster students' creativity are reflected in standards for school evaluation and teacher appraisal. Through the evaluation and assessment framework, actors are held accountable for progress against these objectives.

Figure 5.1. System Evaluation



Tools for system evaluation

Administrative data about students, teachers and schools are held in central information systems

In most OECD countries, data such as student demographic information, attendance and performance, teacher data and school characteristics are held in a comprehensive data system, commonly referred to as an EMIS. Data are collected according to national and international standardised definitions, enabling data to be collected once, used across the national education system and reported internationally. An effective EMIS also allows users to analyse data and helps disseminate information about education inputs, processes and outcomes (Abdul-Hamid, 2014[10]).

National and international assessments provide reliable data on learning outcomes

Over the past two decades, there has been a major expansion in the number of countries using standardised assessments. The vast majority of OECD countries (30), and an increasing number of non-member countries, have regular national assessments of student achievement for at least one level of the school system (OECD, 2015[11]). This reflects the global trend towards greater demand for outcomes data to monitor government effectiveness, as well as a greater appreciation of the economic importance of all students mastering essential skills. The primary purpose of a national assessment is to provide

reliable data on student learning outcomes that are comparative across different groups of students and over time (OECD, 2013[1]). Assessments can also serve other purposes such as providing information to teachers, schools and students to enhance learning and supporting school accountability frameworks. Unlike national examinations, they do not have an impact on students' progression through grades. When accompanied by background questionnaires, assessments provide insights into the factors influencing learning at the national level and across specific groups. While the design of national assessments varies considerably across OECD countries, there is consensus that having regular, reliable national data on student learning is essential for both system accountability and improvement.

An increasing number of countries also participate in international assessments like the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the two programmes of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). These assessments provide countries with periodic information to compare learning against international benchmarks as a complement to national data.

Thematic reports complement data to provide information about the quality of teaching and learning processes

Qualitative information helps to contextualise data and provide insights into what is happening in a country's classrooms and schools. For example, school evaluations can provide information about the quality of student-teacher interactions and how a principal motivates and recognises staff. Effective evaluation systems use such findings to help understand national challenges – like differences in student outcomes across schools.

A growing number of OECD countries undertake policy evaluations

Despite an increased interest across countries in policy evaluations, it is rarely systematic at present. Different approaches include evaluation shortly after implementation, and *ex ante* reviews of major policies to support future decision-making (OECD, 2018[12]). Countries are also making greater efforts to incorporate evidence to inform policy design, for example, by commissioning randomised control trials to determine the likely impact of a policy intervention.

Effective evaluation systems requires institutional capacity within and outside government

System evaluation requires resources and skills *within* ministries of education to develop, collect and manage reliable, quality datasets and to exploit education information for evaluation and policy-making purposes. Capacity *outside* or at arms-length from ministries is equally important, and many OECD countries have independent evaluation institutions that contribute to system evaluation. Such institutions might undertake external analysis of public data, or be commissioned by the government to produce annual reports on the education system and undertake policy evaluations or other studies. In order to ensure that such institutions have sufficient capacity, they may receive public funding, but their statutes and appointment procedures ensure their independence and the integrity of their work.

System evaluation in Albania

Albania has taken steps to establish some of the integral components needed to perform system evaluation (see Table 5.1). For example, Albania has several bodies with responsibilities for system evaluation, a national assessment of student learning in Grade 5 and a new EMIS currently in development that promises to modernise the way education data is collected and managed. While these are positive features that can certainly help support system evaluation, the current tools for this process remain nascent. Despite the fact that Socrates has been under development for many years, Albania's lack of a functional EMIS is a striking gap compared to other OECD and developing countries. Moreover, while other countries in the Western Balkans have struggled to introduce a national assessment for system-monitoring purposes, Albania's assessment does not currently provide comparable results at the national level. In order to conduct comprehensive and co-ordinated system evaluation, Albania needs to address capacity constraints and invest in high-quality evaluation tools.

Table 5.1. System evaluation in Albania

References for national vision and goals	Tools	Body responsible	Outputs
• Law on Pre-university Education (2012, 2015, 2018) • National Strategy for Pre-university Education 2014 – 2020 • National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020	Administrative data	Educational Services Centre (ESC)	EMIS (in pilot phase)
		Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics Sector (in MoESY)	Annual and ad-hoc education statistics releases; periodic reporting on government strategies
	National assessment	ESC	Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF, Grade 5): Albanian language; mathematics; science
	International assessments	ESC	• Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, age 15): mathematics; science; and reading • Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, Grade 4); will participate for first time in 2019 • Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, Grade 4), will participate for first time in 2021
	School evaluations	*State Education Inspectorate	Annual report on the quality of the education process in schools (based on comprehensive and thematic school inspections)
	Policy evaluations	No established process	Some examples of outputs are: • 2014 report on the "Reform of Pre-university System", prepared by a working group led by MoESY • 2018 UNICEF-MoESY review of implementation of new curriculum • 2019 UNICEF-MoESY appraisal of 2014-20 Strategy for Pre-University Education
	Reports and research	MoESY and *specialised agencies (e.g. ESC, State Education Inspectorate, Educational Development Institute)	No overall report on the education system; various specialised agencies periodically report on their respective areas of work
		Donors and non-governmental organisations	Important providers of ad-hoc research and analysis

Note: *In 2019, the State Education Inspectorate merged with the Educational Development Institute to form the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, and the school inspection function is now being fulfilled by the General Directorate for Pre-University Education (see Chapter 1).
Source: MoESY (2018[13]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana; Wort, M., D. Pupovci and E. Ikonomi (2019[14]), *Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020*, UNICEF Albania, Tirana.

High-level documents express a national vision for pre-tertiary education

Albania's Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020 (hereby, the strategy) provides a vision for education focused on equipping students with the competencies and self-esteem needed for success in a global, diverse and technological world (MoESY, 2016[15]). The strategy sets out four broad policy objectives (see Chapter 1) that aim to improve Albania's pre-tertiary education system in the areas of governance, inclusion, quality assurance and the professional development of teachers and school leaders. These areas were identified as key challenges in a report prepared by the ministry and education experts in 2014 (MoESY, 2014[16]). The report underwent a wide consultation process with international, national and local stakeholders who helped shape the strategy's contents. The current strategy does not address higher education nor vocational education and training.

This high-level document offers continuity with Albania's previous education strategies and reform programmes. The consistency has helped Albania achieve important structural changes in recent years, such as the introduction of a new competency-based curriculum, the extension of compulsory education from eight to nine years and the establishment of transparent processes for recruiting teachers and school leaders (see Chapter 1). The education strategy is also aligned with the overarching National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020, which provides a national vision for social and economic development that aims to bring the country closer to European Union (EU) accession (Republic of Albania, 2013[17]).

Indicators and targets are not aligned to drive system improvement

Albania's education strategy contains many important components. In particular, it provides an overview of expected results, a financial summary and deadlines for implementation. The strategy also includes an annex with a set of indicators to measure progress; however, these are generally limited to monitoring inputs and outputs, such as how many students have tablets or how many schools have libraries (MoESY, 2018[13]). A noticeable gap in the strategy's indicator framework is the lack of clear targets, which were an important feature in earlier drafts of the strategy. For example, the draft strategy's indicator framework set targets to raise the amount of per student spending to 999 ALL and to increase the number of inspected educational institutions to 75% by 2020 (MoESY, 2014[18]). However, these targets were removed from the final version of the strategy that was adopted by the government. This is significant because Albania's education sector is underfunded and many of the actions proposed in the strategy cannot be achieved without an increase in funding. The lack of alignment between indicators and targets make it difficult for the education strategy to drive system improvement.

Implementation planning is relatively weak, making it hard to co-ordinate and align actors behind strategic goals

Albania's education strategy includes an implementation plan that outlines main activities, expected outcomes, main contact points and timelines. Despite this, the plan provides limited direction to co-ordinate education actors. This is partly because the implementation plan does not systematically translate actions from the main text into clearly sequenced steps for implementation. For example, only three of six sub-actions proposed to develop data infrastructure in the main text of the strategy are included as steps in the implementation plan: developing the software, conducing analysis of data and preparing targeted reports for different audiences (MoESY, 2016[15]). Other actions the strategy

outlines as important steps needed to establish the new EMIS, such as installing the infrastructure, implementing it and training teams responsible for maintenance and data processing, are excluded from the implementation plan. As a result, the plan does not fully fulfil its function of aligning efforts and resources behind Albania's strategic goals.

Moreover, despite the fact that the current strategy calls for the development of annual sector-wide implementation plans, in reality different agencies develop their own annual work plans, which in turn, make up the "components" of a National Plan for Education (MoESY, 2018[13]). This hinders the government's ability to organise efforts across agencies and allocate resources according to priorities. For example, the overarching implementation plan identifies the ministry and Regional Education Directorates (REDs) as the bodies responsible for building the country's EMIS. However, the ministry has assigned the ESC this task and there has been no subsequent engagement from the ministry and REDs. The lack of strong sector-wide planning and co-ordination makes it difficult for Albania to establish a central source of information about the education system.

Discussions about the future of the education strategy are underway

There are ongoing discussions within the ministry about what to do once the current education strategy ends in 2020. Options include extending the existing strategy or developing a new strategy that will cover the whole education sector, including higher education and vocational education. This next strategy will direct reform during a critical period for Albania's national development and potential accession to the EU. Merely extending the current strategy would represent a missed opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the education system relative to this changing landscape, and to develop a strategic set of policy goals for the future.

The process of developing a new strategy is as important as the content itself. Albania plans to continue the existing practice of conducting analysis to identify strategic issues and consulting with stakeholders in order to develop the next education strategy. However, discussions about what resources are available and required for successfully implementing the new strategy seem to be limited. While requirements for the European Commission's Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance are part of the planning discussion, budgeting the future education strategy also requires pragmatic conversations and support from the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Albania's current education strategy has a budget gap of around 43% between the planned budget for 2019 and what was approved (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonomi, 2019[14]). Funding discussions should be more robust to help the Albanian education ministry prioritise goals and actions for system improvement.

Tools for system evaluation are poorly co-ordinated and often unreliable

Albania has established some of the institutions and processes required to gather information and monitor the performance of the education system. However, there are significant challenges in how data is collected and its resultant quality. While Albania introduced a new national assessment of student achievement in Grade 5, it is not yet administered in a way that yields reliable results. Albania's National Basic Education Examination faces similar reliability concerns (see Chapter 2). This means that the country's only trustworthy sources of information about student learning come from sample-based international assessments, such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA), and the State Matura Examination that students take at the end of upper secondary school.

Processes to collect administrative data are poorly co-ordinated and out of date

The ministry, through its Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics sector (hereby, the MPS sector), works with regional directorates and local education offices (recently restructured, see Evaluation institutions) and schools to collect administrative data according to a template provided by the Albanian Institute for Statistics (INSTAT). First, schools report their data to local education offices and regional directorates using Microsoft Excel and emails. Then the local education offices and regional directorates compile and share this information with the ministry. These procedures are time-consuming, error-prone and do not allow for real-time monitoring. Albania also faces challenges mapping the codes of national databases to international questionnaires, though the ministry is working with INSTAT to better align national data with international standards set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In addition to reporting information to local education offices, regional directorates and the ministry, schools and other education institutions must also provide information to the ESC. This data feeds into one of the ESC's four educational databases: the student registry for schooling; the student registry for higher education; the database for the State Matura exam; and a registry on the state exam results for regulated (licenced) professions, which includes teachers. These databases help ESC deliver national assessments and exams, for example, by identifying how many test booklets they need to print. However, some parallel data collection exists between the ministry, regional directorates and local education offices and the ESC. All collect data about student GPAs. Additionally, sometimes the ministry, regional directorates, or local education offices, the last of which has direct contact with schools, will request that schools report data on student assessment results, which are available in ESC databases. This duplication can create an unnecessary reporting burden for schools.

Data is not integrated across Albania's databases

There are no unique student or teacher identifiers within or across Albania's various education databases. In fact, students are currently assigned different identification numbers for each national assessment and exam they take and this information cannot be linked. The lack of unique identifiers makes it difficult to merge databases, conduct cross-institutional research, track an individual's progression through the system and analyse education inputs, processes and outcomes. For instance, while the ministry stores student and teacher demographic data in their central databases, examinations data are located in ESC systems and there is no link between the two systems. As a result, researchers cannot immediately access the data they need to answer important questions, such as what teachers and schools are achieving good student outcomes and which are in need of more support? The problem of data fragmentation and overlap is compounded by the fact that Albania's Ministry of the Economy and Finance collects and manages all data on vocational education and training. This makes it difficult to collect reliable information about enrolment rates and employment outcomes across different upper secondary programmes.

The Educational Services Centre is developing a new education management information system

In order to upgrade the way in which Albania collects and manages education data, the Educational Services Centre is developing an education management information system, called Socrates, which will introduce a unique student identifier and store information related to students, teachers, curriculum and schools in the pre-tertiary education system.

The unique identifier will follow students from the time they enter the school system until the end of upper secondary school. It is not yet decided if the unique identifier will follow students until the end of higher education.

Socrates is currently in the pilot phase and despite the 2015 deadline for installing the software and infrastructure (as stated in the strategy) the ESC expects that Socrates will only be functional by mid-2020. The EMIS system has the potential to streamline data collection processes in Albania through the creation of a common platform for data entry and standardised practices for schools to input data. However, there is no clear plan to train school officials on how to use the Socrates system and, importantly, the ministry's MPS sector has not been involved in the planning process. Developing such an important tool in isolation from other key education actors increases the risks that they will bypass the Socrates system and continue collecting their own data in parallel using Excel and email. This is because their needs may not be considered in the design of Socrates and they may not have the skills needed to use the tool effectively.

Public access to education data is improving, but remains limited

The INSTAT Labour Market and Education online data portal provides an easy to use interface that allows individuals to access a limited selection of education indicators, such as student-teacher ratio, field of study and rates of enrolment and graduation. Users can download data as Excel files, analyse it and re-use it. The ministry prepares annual statistical yearbooks with this administrative data and the ESC regularly reports on results from the national assessment and exams. However, data provided by the ministry and the ESC are only available as tables within PDF documents and do not have the same functionalities as the INSTAT data portal. The lack of automated data reporting means that both the government, education agencies and the public must submit written requests for education data to the ministry or manually input data copied from annual reports into statistical software programmes. Currently, statistical data management depends on 1-2 key people in the ministry's MPS sector, meaning the capacity to respond to data requests is limited and can cause delays for users. At this stage, it is unclear if the Socrates EMIS will establish an interface for different users within the government or make parts of the system available to the public.

The national assessment of student achievement is not standardised

Albania established the Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF) in 2015-16. Following a pilot study of sample-based national assessments for Grades 3 and 5 in 2014-15, the ministry chose to implement the VANAF as an annual census-based assessment for all students in Grade 5 and not conduct a national assessment for lower grades. The ESC, which manages the assessment, produced an official report that includes a description of the methodology, student results and sample test questions. However, there is no analysis as to whether the assessment's design was effective nor explanations for why the ministry decided to forgo the grade three assessment. This decision aligns with Albania's tradition of conducting external census-based assessments at key stages of the education cycle but does not necessarily provide the best approach for supporting system goals to improve student learning. Table 5.2 provides a summary of key information about Albania's national assessment.

Table 5.2. Key information about Albania's national assessment, VANAF

Topic	Summary
Stated purposes	• Assessment of pupils' achievements in primary education • Upgrade the skills, knowledge and know-how of pupils • Monitor and control the implementation of the curriculum • Inform students, parents and educational institutions about students' achievements through valid and reliable assessment
Grade and frequency	Annual assessment at the end of primary education; compulsory for all students enrolled in Grade 5
Subjects	Albanian language; mathematics; science
Variables collected	12 questions in background survey; collects information on gender (male/female), type of school (public/private) and geographic area (urban/rural); no proxy for socio-economic background
Format	90-minute paper-based test with 50 multiple-choice and open-ended questions in an integrated format. 22 questions related to the Albanian language (30 points), 18 questions associated with mathematics (20 points) and 10 questions associated with natural science (10 points).
Marking	Local education offices mark the test within 15 days and share the results with the ESC. Assessments are marked with a maximum of 60 points, which correspond to six levels of proficiency from insufficient (Level 0) to very high (Level 6).
Results	The ESC prepares a public national report each year on student achievement in the VANAF. These reports are shared with regional directorates, local education offices and schools.

Source: MoESY (2018[13]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*; ESC (2017[19]), Vlerësimi i Arritjeve të Nxënësve [Assessment of Students' Achievements of the 5th Grade], The Educational Services Centre, Tirana.

The VANAF does not yield results that are reliable at national level

While it is positive that Albania has a regular national assessment of student learning outcomes, there are some concerns with respect to the VANAF's design and implementation. In particular, it fails to address an information gap about student learning in the early years of primary school. This prevents the ministry from developing a better understanding about student performance early on, when adjustments to the curriculum and teaching practice could have the greatest impact on learning outcomes throughout school. Marking procedures present another concern since they do not currently ensure comparability across the country. As a result, the ministry cannot use the VANAF as a reliable tool for system monitoring. Albania's National Basic Education Exam faces similar reliability concerns (see Chapter 2).

As a census-based assessment, the VANAF has the potential to support granular levels of analysis, such as examining differences associated with attending a satellite and/or multi-grade school versus a more traditional school setting. However, because there is no unique student identifier or reliable EMIS system to link information across different databases, this type of analysis relies on information in the VANAF background questionnaire. Currently, the background questionnaire allows results to be disaggregated by gender (male/female), type of school (public/private) and geographic area (urban/rural) but there is no information to help better understand socio-economic disparities, school settings or other associations that are relevant for policy.

These current challenges prevent the VANAF from yielding reliable evidence about the extent to which students achieve curriculum standards. They also place limitations on the type of research that could support system evaluation and inform policy. Despite these reliability issues, Albania still uses VANAF results as a transparency and accountability tool. In particular, the ESC publishes a national report each year that ranks schools according to aggregate student scores on the VANAF. It also does so without any contextualised information. This is unfair to schools that are located in disadvantaged areas

or serve a significant proportion of students who face challenges that affect their learning (see Chapter 4) (OECD, 2013[1]). The national report is the only outreach material prepared for disseminating VANAF results. While these reports are sent to schools, regional directorates and local education offices, they are not tailored to the different audiences and data is only accessible in Word and PDF tables. This discourages secondary analysis and undermines the potential of the assessment to inform policy and practice.

Albania participates increasingly in international assessments

Albania's ESC is responsible for administering international assessments and producing national reports on PISA results, most recently from PISA 2018 (forthcoming). Participation in PISA 2000, implemented in 2002, allowed for the first international comparison of student learning outcomes in Albania and sparked a national debate on the quality of education and the need for better measures of learning quality, efficiency and accountability in the education system (OECD, 2003[20]). The country has regularly participated in PISA since 2009 and is taking part in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's TIMSS and PIRLS for the first time in 2019 and 2021 respectively. Despite Albania's increasing participation in international assessments, the country has not used these instruments to set national benchmarks or goals that could help drive system improvement.

Evaluation and thematic reports

No annual report evaluates the state of the education system

The ministry does not produce an annual report on the performance of the education system. However, most technical agencies prepare annual reports based on their respective programmes of work. The only regular public reporting the ministry provides is an annual statistical yearbook on education, sports and youth. This report monitors trends according to administrative data, such as the number of students enrolled across different levels of education over time, by gender, type of school (public vs. private), geographic area (urban vs. rural) and region. Examples of regular reports from Albania's technical agencies include the former State Education Inspectorate's annual report summarising findings gathered through school and thematic external evaluations (see Chapter 4) and ESC reports on results from student assessments and exams. However, these strands of information are not pulled together in a comprehensive report that evaluates the overall state of the Albanian education system. The lack of a regular analytical report makes it difficult to highlight and communicate main system-level challenges and identify policy priorities.

In 2019, UNICEF supported the ministry in conducting an appraisal of the 2014-2020 education strategy. This was the first comprehensive system-level analysis of Albania's education sector since 2014, just prior to the adoption of the current education strategy. The ministry also plans to start monitoring the 2017-2022 Strategy of Research, Innovation and Science, which outlines the vision, policies and strategic objectives for the development of science, technology and innovation (Republic of Albania, 2017[21]). While these exercises mark an important shift towards more comprehensive system evaluation, they appear ad-hoc and there are no plans to establish a regular calendar of strategy reviews.

Ad-hoc thematic reports provide some information for system evaluation

Technical agencies within the ministry periodically produce thematic reports that address particular issues within the education system. For example, agencies have published reports on the training needs of principals and teachers (2016), on the perception of teachers and parents towards the quality of the pre-tertiary education reform (2017) and on student

achievement in multi-grade classrooms (2017). Many of these ad-hoc thematic reports are available on the websites of the respective agencies that produce them; however, some are prepared for internal use only. While the ministry and its affiliated agencies are responsible for most analytical reports about the education system, they commission external researchers to undertake some of the work. However, members of the research community who met with the OECD review team revealed that these requests were often for *ex-post* evaluations and were not always used to help inform future decision-making.

Donors and non-governmental organisations have undertaken analysis that support system evaluation

International and non-governmental organisations have contributed to system evaluation in Albania by undertaking valuable analysis. For example, UNESCO published a sector-wide education policy review in 2017 that addressed curriculum, ICTs in education, and policies related to teachers and school leaders. UNICEF has also made important analytical contributions, notably by supporting a pilot national assessment that laid the foundation for the VANAF and conducting an evaluation on the implementation of the new competency-based curriculum. While the work of external actors can provide important insights for system evaluation, it can also lead the government to pay less attention to developing the technical capacity of national agencies. For example, the ministry's MPS sector was tasked with conducting regular monitoring and evaluation of the education strategy; however, with only three staff members, external support was needed to make this activity happen.

Evaluation institutions

At the time of this review, Albania did not have a dedicated unit or agency responsible for research and evaluation across the entire education system. However, the Albanian government implemented a reform in March 2019 which established two new institutions, one of which is now responsible for assessing performance of the education system. The two new institutions that were created are:

- The Quality Assurance Agency, which merged the functions of the former State Education Inspectorate and the Education Development Institute. This agency is now responsible for setting teaching standards, learning standards, curriculum design and teacher training programmes (the former Education Development Institute mandate), as well as designing and revising the framework for school evaluation (the former State Education Inspectorate's mandate, see Chapter 4). In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency has a new mandate to monitor the performance of the education system. However, this appears to overlap with the ministry's MPS sector, which also has some responsibilities for system monitoring.
- The General Directorate for Pre-University Education (hereby, the General Directorate), which serves as the ministry's implementation arm for pre-tertiary education by co-ordinating the work of four regional directorates located in Lezhë, Durrës, Korçë and Fier, as well as local education offices for 51 municipalities. The General Directorate and the regional directorates have identical organisational structures that are responsible for planning school budgets, collecting and processing statistical data, implementing curriculum and standards and providing technical assistance to schools. The local education offices are much smaller bodies that concentrate on curriculum implementation and supporting schools. Importantly, the General Directorate and regional directorates are also responsible

for monitoring, evaluating and inspecting schools, using the framework developed by the Quality Assurance Agency.

This re-organisation presents two main concerns for system evaluation. The first is that merging the responsibility for school inspections with the same body that supports schools threatens to reduce the objectivity of external school evaluations and weaken the quality of the information available on the performance of schools (see Chapter 4). Another concern raised by this new organisational structure is that responsibilities for system evaluation appear fragmented. At present, the ministry's MPS sector, the new Quality Assurance Agency, and to some extent the new General Directorate all have some remit to help monitor and/or evaluate the education system. Considering Albania's limited capacity and resources for conducting system evaluation, it is important that these bodies are well co-ordinated to ensure their roles are complementary and avoid duplication.

Policy issues

The primary challenge to developing system evaluation in Albania is the limited availability of co-ordinated and high-quality data. Addressing this requires a modern system for collecting and using data to support evaluation and addressing key data gaps, in particular with respect to student learning. Compared to the majority of European countries in the OECD, Albania's education data systems are still nascent, partly because of the relatively weak culture of evaluation within the government. As a result, strategies and polices are often set without sufficient analysis, regular monitoring and reporting on progress is limited, and capacity for fulfilling these important functions is relatively weak. Building stronger demand for information and analysis within government, and developing the institutions and procedures to support a culture of system evaluation, will be important to ensure that the data systems recommended by this review are established, utilised and developed meaningfully over time. The development of a new education strategy presents an opportunity for Albania to embed evaluation more centrally in the government's planning and policy-making process.

Policy issue 5.1. Establishing the processes and capacity needed to conduct system evaluation

The culture of monitoring, evaluation and research in Albania's education system is underdeveloped compared to practices in OECD and other European countries. Prior to 2017, there was no agency or unit responsible for monitoring the education system. Today, the ministry's MPS sector remains poorly staffed with only three individuals responsible for monitoring implementation of the education strategy and managing all official statistical evidence in the sector. At the same time, the newly established Quality Assurance Agency is now responsible for monitoring education system performance but has limited experience with system evaluation and did not receive any additional funding or staff to help fulfil this mandate. The General Directorate has also been tasked with collecting and processing statistical data about the performance of schools but it is unclear how this information will feed into other system monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Without stronger capacity and clearer processes for system evaluation, it will be difficult to promote a culture of regular evaluation and strategic learning within Albania's education sector.The country needs to stimulate greater demand for evidence and greater investment in its generation, which in turn can help inform strategic planning and policy-making. By disseminating information in ways that are timely, relevant and accessible, Albania can also support greater transparency and public accountability for educational improvement. This can help build trust in the major reforms underway and support for their achievement.

Recommendation 5.1.1. Integrate evaluation processes into the future strategy

The task of developing a new education strategy presents a chance for Albania to integrate evaluation more centrally into the government's planning and policy-making processes. While the current education strategy was built on an analysis of sector performance and a broad consultation process, this resulted in a long list of aspirations and actions with no clear set of priorities. This is because all of the comments from the consultation process were included in the document without selection and prioritisation or consideration for the cost of each proposed action. Considering Albania's limited education budget, it is crucial the government direct reform efforts to where they will have the greatest impact. Prioritising strategic issues, setting clear goals and developing implementation plans that are detailed and feasible can help strengthen results-oriented and accountable planning processes. This will require strong system evaluation tools, such as a reliable EMIS (see Policy issue 5.2), that provide reliable and timely data to inform policy decisions, communicate the rationale for these choices and monitor progress.

Prioritise a select number of challenges and goals to focus the education strategy

Conducting an analysis of sector performance and organising a consultation are positive aspects of Albania's process for developing its education strategy. However, including all of the comments and proposals from the public consultation without prioritising them resulted in a final strategy document that has a long list of 48 expected results, 43 main activities and 194 sub-activities (MoESY, 2016[15]). Tackling a multitude of challenges at once is not an effective way to identify strategic issues and set balanced goals because the lack of prioritisation makes it difficult to orient actors around a common agenda for improvement. As such, this review recommends that Albania prepare future education strategies by continuing to triangulate information about the education system - drawing on both analysis and consultations - but also by taking decisions about what issues are most pressing and identifying goals and actions to focus the scope of the education strategy. While a consultation on priorities is the best possible way to ensure agreement and make an informed selection, a final decision on the scope and priorities should come from the top-level decision-makers who are responsible for adopting the strategy (OECD, 2018[22]).

The prioritisation process should reconcile the variety of aspirations different stakeholders may have with what is realistic in the Albanian context, especially in terms of resource, technical and human capacity. This implies creating stronger links between the strategy's proposals and the state education budget. Albania currently includes a high-level summary budget in its education strategy, which gives the document credibility by identifying the cost for proposed activities. However, since many of the nearly 200 sub-activities require significant financial investments and human capacity, such as reforming the State Matura Examination, resource implications for each of the proposed activities should be carefully considered before they are included in future strategies. This can help the ministry determine if available funding is sufficient for each proposal or if gaps can be reasonably filled to achieve desired outcomes. The Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Prime Minister's office should be included in the prioritisation exercise to ensure the contents of future education strategies are financially viable and align with broader government goals.

Clearly present evidence to justify the education system's top challenges

Once a set of priorities have been identified, it is important for the strategy document to clearly present the evidence and reasoning that lay behind the prioritisation process. In the current strategy, Albania included a synthesis of findings from the comprehensive report on the state of the education system that informed the strategy's contents. However, the

synthesis does not systematically highlight evidence to provide a clear understanding of system challenges, why they exist and how acute they are. For example, the strategy identifies the challenge of including children with Roma or Balkan Egyptian backgrounds in kindergarten and preparatory classes (MoESY, 2016[15]). However, the text does not provide any data on enrolment rates by student profile. This may be caused by lack of available data but without clear evidence, the strategy cannot illustrate the extent to which the enrolment of children with these backgrounds is a challenge. Without such information, individuals who are supposed to act on the strategy may not be convinced why this was identified as a strategic challenge for the country.

Strategy documents do not need to include all of the evidence gathered during the system-level analysis but a selection should be included to help inform subsequent prioritisation processes (OECD, 2018[22]). Albania should ensure that future education strategies use evidence to help clearly express connections between national education challenges, system goals and policy actions. This can be done by reviewing how system challenges are presented in the strategy document and organising evidence in a way that clearly introduces the need for a particular goal or activity. There are several tools that can help support this process and make the presented information more strategic and focused. For example, Namibia presented an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and an analysis of political, economic, social, technological and legal factors (PESTL) to set the context for introducing the strategic issues addressed in its national education strategy (see Box 5.1). A similar approach would help Albania's next education strategy make a stronger and more targeted case for reform.

Include precise targets in the indicator framework

Once a small set of goals and actions have been agreed on as priorities, the ministry should set up a comprehensive national indicator framework and set realistic targets and milestones for improvement. An important part of this process will be to assess what information sources are currently available and identify where gaps exist that would help support the strategy's achievement.

Early drafts of Albania's current education strategy included an annexed indicator framework with measurable targets; however, the space for such targets within the official strategy adopted by the Albanian government is empty. While the draft targets had proposed gradual improvements, it is unlikely these were feasible without a detailed implementation plan and sufficient resources. The removal of targets makes it difficult for various actors to know what they are working towards, measure progress and identify where greater efforts are needed to reach system goals. In the future, Albania should ensure that clear, specific and realistic targets are included within the strategy's indicator framework to serve as yardsticks for measuring success and support system planning.

Box 5.1. Communicating strategic issues through high-level strategy documents

The Strategic Plan (2017/18 – 2021/22) of the Namibian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture dedicates a section to carefully explaining the evidence analysis that was performed to determine the country's strategic issues. In particular, the analysis was based on PESTL and SWOT analysis tools:

- **Political, economic, social, technological and legal factors (PESTL) analysis** is a framework for the analysis of the external environment of the policy in question. It comprises a checklist of areas to be examined when analysing these factors. It is

used to determine the external factors that have or will have an enabling or hindering impact on the policy.

- **Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis** is done through brainstorming sessions, workshops or focus groups and involves a wide range of stakeholders and representatives from related organisations. Challenges in SWOT analysis include confusing a strength with an opportunity and a weakness with a threat. This judgement should always be the result of deliberative discussion among stakeholders and no factor should appear under more than one category.

These tools can and are normally used together in order to consider internal and external factors that can have an impact on a determined policy. For example, the impacts of a specific political agenda identified in the PESTL analysis can be translated into opportunities and threats in the SWOT framework. In the case of Namibia, the Strategic Plan includes two short paragraphs that highlight findings from PESTL and SWOT respectively. The resulting strategic issues, found in a separate section of the document, are further summarised into twelve categories, include developing a plan for infrastructure and improving data management.

Sources: Ministry of Education (2017[23]), *Strategic Plan 2017/18 – 2021/22*, http://www.moe.gov.na/files/downloads/b7b_Ministry%20Strategic%20Plan%202017-2022.pdf (accessed on 18 November 2019); Vági, P. and E. Rimkute (2018[24]), "Toolkit for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of public administration reform and sector strategies", https://doi.org/10.1787/37e212e6-en..

Develop more detailed implementation plans

Albania's current education strategy includes a high-level implementation plan that associates each activity with a timeline and points of contact. This practice should be continued in future education strategies as it can help keep the implementation process on schedule and facilitate co-ordination. Despite these positive components, however, Albania's implementation plan lacks the clarity and detail required to direct action across the sector, in part because it does not systematically translate activities from the main text into clearly sequenced steps for implementation.

The ministry could ameliorate future implementation plans by clearly aligning activities to system goals and providing more specific steps for implementation. For example, if the next strategy includes an emphasis on developing education data infrastructure, as this review recommends, then the implementation plan would need to include not only developing EMIS software but also installing it and training individuals who will use and manage it (see Table 5.3 and Table 5.4).These plans can maintain some flexibility to accommodate the lessons learnt throughout the implementation process but should still identify which actors to involve and hold accountable for developing the data infrastructure, as well as consider what tools and resources these individuals will need to achieve the desired outcomes (Viennet and Pont, 2017[25]). While high-level implementation plans can provide an important framework for the duration of Albania's education strategies, detailed annual plans would help strengthen the co-ordination of education actors around national strategic priorities and support system planning.

Table 5.3. Example of item from Albania's current implementation plan

Policy Objective	Activity	Sub-activities (products)	Responsibility	Timeline
A. Enhance leadership, governance and resource management capacities.	A.4. Infrastructure for data processing in education is built.	Develop software and infrastructure for EMIS.	MoESY RED	2014-15
		Analysis and comparison of data.	MoESY RED Schools	2015-16
		Reports are published systematically for each audience.	MoESY	2016-20

Source: MoESY (2016[15]), *Strategjisë së Zhvillimit të Arsimit Parauniversitar, për Periudhën 2014–2020 [Strategy on Pre-University Education Development 2014-2020]*, www.qbz.gov.al (accessed on 16 January 2019).

Table 5.4. Proposal for item in Albania's future implementation plan

Goal	Activity	Sub-activities	Timeline	Responsible agents		Outcome
				Lead	Partners	
Enhance efficiency of the education system.	Modernise education management information system (EMIS).	Develop software and infrastructure for EMIS.	Years 1 - 2	MoESY	ESC Regional directorales	A modern and fully operational EMIS.
		Install appreciate physical infrastructure for EMIS at the school and ministry level.	Years 2 - 3	MoESY	Schools	
		Train teams responsible for maintenance, processing and analysis of data.	Years 3 - 4	MoESY		
		Establish protocols for data definitions, collection and retrieval from schools.	Years 3 - 4	MoESY	INSTAT	
		Implement EMIS and train users on above protocols.	Years 5 - 6	MoESY	Regional directorates Schools	
		Create quality assurance procedures to verify the accuracy of data.	Years 5 - 6	Supreme State Audit	MoESY INSTAT	
		Regularly report data for different audiences.	Years 5 -	MoESY		
		Create user-friendly interfaces to make data easily accessible for users	Years 7 - 9	MoESY	Schools Researchers	

Source: Authors.

Recommendation 5.1.2. Develop the capacity to conduct system evaluation

This review recommends that Albania's future education strategies give central attention to strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity. This can help develop the country's nascent tools for system evaluation and generate a greater demand for evidence to inform education policy. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity requires well-co-ordinated evaluation bodies that are objective and credible and have sufficient resources and staff with the relevant skills needed to conduct rigorous and reliable analysis. In many OECD countries, a network of agencies and institutions (e.g. government agencies, research institutions, universities) contribute to system evaluation, which can be especially helpful if they have technical expertise in different areas. Moreover, when these agencies are allowed to operate with some degree of autonomy, they can provide an independent voice to help scrutinise education policies and the sector as a whole. In recent years, there has been progress in Albania's capacity to collect, analyse and use evidence about its education system. However, the country's overall capacity for evaluation remains underdeveloped and the recent re-organisation of education agencies has led to confusion about the roles different agencies play in monitoring and evaluating system performance.

Albania should strengthen the capacity of the ministry's MPS sector so that the central administration is able to collate information from across the education system and use it to inform and evaluate policy. At the same time, there is an urgent need to more clearly define the evaluation role of the new Quality Assurance Agency to avoid duplication with other education agencies and the MPS sector. Efforts to develop evaluation capacity should also extend to the General Directorate and its four regional directorates. This is especially important given that regional offices are expected to increasingly support schools, as recommended by this review (see Chapter 4). To do this, regional directorates need to be able to identify the main education issues facing their region, use evidence to set priorities for region-wide professional development and identify which schools require additional support. This will require using a wide range of evidence about the performance of schools, teachers and students under their jurisdiction.

Co-ordinate monitoring and evaluation responsibilities at the central level

Responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the entire Albanian education system currently cut across different parts of the ministry and education agencies, making it difficult to co-ordinate activities. This review recommends that Albania clearly define the roles and responsibilities for system evaluation, in particular for the ministry's MPS sector and the new Quality Assurance Agency.

Considering the MPS sector's proximity to central leadership, this body has the potential to help raise the demand for evidence among high-level policy makers. Examples of the tasks this sector should be responsible for include providing the ministry with information to inform policy decisions on a daily basis and guiding the ministry's research agenda to evaluate strategic issues or specific policies. The sector could perform research and evaluation work itself, or it could prioritise and commission it from other actors, such as the Quality Assurance Agency or universities. In the future, the ministry should consider making the MPS sector responsible for managing Socrates (see Recommendation 5.2.1). This would help position Socrates as a central, unified source of national education data and ensure that the sector does not continue collecting data through Excel and email in parallel, while the modern EMIS is managed by another agency.

On the other hand, the Quality Assurance Agency should serve as Albania's technical body for education research and system evaluation. Specifically, the agency should be responsible for regularly reporting on progress towards strategic goals (see Recommendation 5.1.3). For example, the agency could prepare the analytical report on the quality of education that this review recommends. This would help offset some of the MPS sector's responsibilities, such as conducting regular appraisals of the strategy's implementation. Placing the responsibility for evaluating and reporting on system goals within a technical agency located outside of the central ministry can help reduce the risk of political influence in evaluation activities while developing education research capacity in general.

Ensure evaluation bodies have the resources needed to achieve their mandates

Albania's evaluation bodies require adequate financial and human resources in order to conduct system evaluation. Currently, the MPS sector only has three staff members and the Quality Assurance Agency has limited experience in system evaluation. Moreover, while the agency has dedicated departments for system evaluation and quality evaluation respectively, it did not receive sufficient resources and does not have adequate capacity to carry out its new mandate to monitor system performance. Albania's evaluation bodies require additional resources and reliable multi-year funding so that political tensions and unstable resources do not limit or take priority over this work. In the case of the MPS sector, additional staff with experience in quantitative and qualitative analysis, use of evidence in policy-making and delivery of policy would also be important to give the sector more credibility. The sector's current staff size is inadequate if it is to achieve such a broad and important mandate. By comparison, a similar unit in Romania's Ministry of National Education has nine staff members (Kitchen, H., 2017[26]) and agencies in some OECD countries have even more. In New Zealand for example, 150 designated review officers work for the country's Education Review Office, which is responsible for monitoring the performance of New Zealand's education system (Nusche et al., 2012[27]; ERO, n.d.[28]).

Strengthen regional capacity for evaluation and improve accountability for educational quality

The need for Albania to develop capacity for system evaluation is not limited to the central level. In light of decentralisation reforms, regional directorates are increasingly responsible for ensuring the quality and functioning of schools in their jurisdiction, which requires being able to use a range of evidence (MoESY, 2018[13]). Information on educational quality within these administrative areas is also needed to assess the extent to which regional directorates are meeting national education goals.

Regional directorates are provided with very little technical and analytical support from central government and their capacity to carry out system evaluation is limited. For example, each regional directorate has a sector for human resources and statistics that reports education data to the central ministry. However, this unit does not make comparisons with national averages nor does it systematically use contextual data to better understand the performance of schools and students in their jurisdictions. Previous reviews of Albania's education system have found that the lack of information sharing, communication and transparency between the national, regional and local levels of education often result in duplication of efforts and implementation gaps (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonomi, 2019[14]; UNESCO, 2017[29]). To keep all actors informed about the state of education in different parts of the country and improve accountability, Albania should support regional capacity for system evaluation by:

- **Creating an analytical unit within each regional directorate.** Once the Socrates EMIS is fully developed, regional directorates will no longer need to employ statisticians to help collect data from schools. Instead, the ministry might create an analytical unit within each of the four regional directorates to transform the role of these statisticians from data collectors to data analysts. In addition to staff with quantitative skills, these new regional analytical units would also need one or two staff members with broad research experience who can manage a regional research agenda and use evidence to inform and help deliver policy. This new unit could be tasked with conducting analysis to identify high-priority needs, evaluating policy approaches and reporting on regional progress to the General Directorate at the central level.
- **Providing regional analysis on key outcome indicators.** The ministry and central education agencies could better support regional directorates by preparing analytical reports that collectively help identify strengths and challenges of a particular region and measure their performance against national education goals. For example, the ESC could prepare individualised reports on VANAF results for each region, showing how the region performs against national average and areas with similar characteristics, as well as disaggregating data within the region.
- **Developing a regional view in Socrates.** The new Socrates system could include a platform where regional directorates can access information and conduct their own analysis to better understand the factors that are influencing the performance of students and schools in their jurisdiction. Staff within the new regional directorate analytical units will need to be trained to use Socrates.
- **Providing templates for reporting against national targets.** To hold regional directorates accountable for their role in providing quality education, the ministry could set regular reporting requirements, such as an annual report or brief on the state of education in each region. The new regional directorate analytical units could be tasked with preparing these reports, which should compare the region against national targets, highlight main challenges and plans to address these. The ministry could provide a template for this reporting requirement that regional directorates could complete. These reports should be shared with the public, in addition to the central ministry.

Recommendation 5.1.3. Report on the quality of education regularly and promote the use of evidence to inform policy-making

Regular reporting on the state of the education system is important to keep policy makers, education practitioners and the general public informed and keep the government accountable for its commitments (OECD, 2013[1]). Different agencies and units in the Albanian ministry publish annual reports on their work. For example, every six months the ministry and education agencies must report to the Prime Minister's office using a standardised template that includes the priorities, general objectives, indicators, products and frequency in measurement for each actor; however, the completed templates are not available to the public (MoESY, 2018[13]). While these efforts provide valuable sources of information, the different strands are not pulled together on a regular basis to communicate how the education system is performing as a whole. The MPS sector should task the Quality Assurance Agency to publish a regular report on the state of the education system.

In addition to developing the processes and capacity to conduct comprehensive system evaluation, Albania needs to ensure that evidence is available in timely, relevant and accessible forms. This will enable central government and regional education offices to use evidence about the current performance of the system to inform future policy decisions. Sharing evaluation information will also support accountability within the system and to the public. Over time, disseminating quality evaluation information can help the Albanian government and education community become more sophisticated and demanding consumers of evidence.

Regularly publish an analytical report about the education system

Albania does not have a regular analytical report on the quality of its education system. As a partial result of low staff capacity within the ministry and a generally nascent culture of system evaluation, the only regular reporting the central ministry provides the public is the annual statistical yearbook. This report is not analytical and mainly contains descriptive data in tabular form with very few charts or figures. By contrast, most OECD countries publish regularly an analytical report on education (OECD, 2013[1]). Typically, such reports analyse progress against the national indicator framework and explain the strengths and challenges of the system by studying related inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes (OECD, 2013[1]). National policy goals and priorities guide the content of this report.

Albania should include within the new education strategy a commitment to regular evaluation and reporting on system-wide progress, ideally on an annual or biannual basis. Establishing a regular reporting timeframe is crucial because it supports the policy planning process and lets the public know when to expect up-to-date information on government progress or the overall quality of education. This regular report should be a prominent document that goes beyond reporting on the individual work programmes of various education agencies and pulls together different strands of information from internal agencies and external researchers. Such a report could be produced by the Quality Assurance Agency (see Recommendation 5.1.2). In the Czech Republic and Portugal, annual reports not only provide analysis on the state of education but also information about future policies or activities designed to help improve the system (see Box 5.2). Expectations for Albania's education report could include:

- **Reporting against key national goals**. For example, the annual report might describe progress against short and long-term goals for improving learning outcomes. In Australia for example, the annual report from the Department of Education and Training reports on the system's results against key performance criteria and targets related to the country's education outcomes. (Department of Education and Training, 2018[30]).
- **Analysing progress made.** This should take into account why progress may have been quicker or slower than expected in certain areas. For example, when reporting data on student learning outcomes, this kind of analysis would help policy makers understand not only how students perform, but why they perform that way and what can be done to improve performance nationally.
- **Ensuring the report is easily accessible and publically available**. The report needs to be easy to read and download from the ministry's website. In the future, data included in the report could also be downloadable in a format whereby the research community can easily re-use it to facilitate secondary analysis. This can encourage independent investigation into issues that affect the education system.

- **Receiving dedicated time for parliamentary debate.** Albania should consider giving the Parliament an opportunity to organise committee hearings with the ministry's senior leadership to discuss the contents of the report. In many OECD countries, this offers an important means to hold the government accountable and can be an effective way to embed the use of evidence in policy-making processes (see below).

Box 5.2. Annual analytical reports on the education system in the Czech Republic and Portugal

In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports produces an annual report regarding its evaluation of the country's education system (the Status Report on the Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic). This report relies on a set of indicators designated to assess progress towards the long-term policy objectives of the country. The document summarises the main organisational and legislative changes that occurred in the given year and presents statistical indicators describing the situation and development in pre-primary, basic, secondary and tertiary education. The report also contains information about educational staff in the system, the funding of schools and the labour market situation of school leavers. These data constitute a basis for the development of education policies. Furthermore, the report typically includes an area of specific focus (e.g. the annual report from 2017 includes a section regarding the country's results in PIRLS 2016). Individual regions within the Czech Republic also produce their own reports to assess progress towards long-term policy objectives.

In Portugal, the National Education Council, an independent advisory body to the Ministry of Education, has published the annual State of Education report since 2010, which provides an analysis of key data on the education system. The first issue, the *State of Education 2010 – School Paths*, offered a detailed investigation of student pathways in the education system and the latest issue, *The State of Education 2017,* published in 2018, contains a section dedicated to the state of education in Portugal's "countryside" and the role of education in promoting territorial cohesion. The report also offers policy advice on how to improve the quality of pre-primary, basic, secondary and tertiary education. It also evaluates policy initiatives, such as changes to school evaluation, human and financial resources and also policies addressed to increasing educational equity.

Source: Santiago et al. (2012[31]), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Portugal 2012*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264117020-en; Santiago et al. (2012[32]), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Czech Republic 2012*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264116788-1-en; CNE (2018[33]), *Estado da Educação 2017,* http://www.cnedu.pt (accessed on 18 November 2019).

Embed the use of evidence in the policy-making process

Research on effective policy-making shows the importance of drawing on evidence to inform decisions both before and after implementation (OECD, 2018[12]). There are many ways in which governments use evidence to inform policies and strategic plans. In particular, randomised control trials (RTCs) are increasingly considered one of the best ways to determine the effectiveness of a given policy. This is because RTCs can help estimate the potential impact of a policy intervention before its introduction and measure its success *ex-post*. Findings can then be used to adjust or inform policies, help leverage political commitments and serve as a means to promote greater collaboration among different education agencies.

In Albania, as in many OECD countries, these practices do not happen regularly and when they do, external demand rather than actors within the government often drive them. For example, the pilot study of the national assessment, evaluation of curriculum reform and the recent appraisal of the current education strategy were all completed with financial and/or technical support from international actors. This lack of demand for evidence from within the government contributes to, and is partly a result of, having a relatively politicised legislative context and weak public administration (OECD, 2017[34]). Some ways in which Albania could improve the demand for evidence in education policy-making include:

- Establishing a guideline that all major policy changes should first be piloted and studied rigorously before full-scale implementation. This could take the form of a Ministerial Order and be implemented by the MPS sector.
- Evaluating policies systematically to determine their effectiveness and inform future reforms. For example, Albania might assess effectiveness of the new programme to provide free transportation to students and teachers. The MPS sector could either conduct or commission such analysis.
- Ensuring key actors meet frequently to discuss issues (Bryson, 2018[35]). Albania could organise regular meetings with the heads of education agencies and high-level ministry officials to discuss new research and evidence, then collectively decide what actions to take in response. The MPS sector could organise such meetings on behalf of the Minister. Committee hearings with members of the Parliament could also help embed the use of evidence in policy-making processes.

Policy issue 5.2. Modernising the education management information system

Integrated and comprehensive education management information systems are widespread in OECD and European countries. In Albania, current processes for collecting and managing information about the education sector are outdated and not accessible from a unified source that supports the analysis of information from across different databases. Furthermore, only INSTAT publically reports data in an analytical format, meaning users can easily download information to perform their own analysis and generate new insights. Without sharper tools for managing and using data, Albania is likely to continue struggling with system evaluation.

The forthcoming Socrates platform will be the first database in Albania that combines administrative data and learning outcomes in a central source. It will also allow schools to enter data directly into the system, promising to replace the current process of gathering school-level data through emails and Excel files. This represents an important step towards modernising the collection and management of education data in Albania. However, the development and implementation of Socrates has been slow and poorly co-ordinated. To support system evaluation, Albania should make finalising the new EMIS a priority and establish it as the central source of information about the country's education system. In working towards the development and completion of the new EMIS, Albania should also build in analytical and reporting functions to ensure that Socrates becomes an effective and useful tool for system evaluation.

Recommendation 5.2.1. Address gaps in the development of Socrates and establish it as the central source of education data

The Socrates system is an excellent opportunity for Albania to modernise the collection, management and use of education data. Nevertheless, there are important gaps in current plans for Socrates's development, such as the lack of protocols for defining, collecting and verifying data. Moreover, Albania will need to build the staff capacity to manage the EMIS once it is finalised and establish it as the official go-to source of information for all stakeholders. These efforts are paramount to providing the quantitative information needed to improve system evaluation in Albania.

Establish protocols for data definition, collection and retrieval from schools

To streamline data collection processes in Albania, the ESC plans to train and certify 1-2 individuals within each school to enter data into the Socrates system through a password-protected portal. It will be important that all schools are able to connect to the Internet in order to access the portal and submit data. While directly submitting data reduces the risk of introducing human error, which might occur when school-level information is aggregated manually, Albania does not have common data standards to ensure that all schools have a shared understanding of data definitions. The result is that schools might report indicators or data points in different ways. Accounting for school facilities (e.g. satellite schools) and multi-grade schools is already problematic for current data collection and could intensify when schools start entering data directly into the database. Albania also lacks clear protocols about who can request information from schools. This presents a risk that once implemented, different actors and agencies might bypass the Socrates system and continue to collect school-level data in parallel using email and Excel files.

Many countries have established strict protocols regarding how to define data points and who can retrieve information from schools. For example, the United States uses common data standards to ensure that schools enter information directly into databases consistently (see Box 5.3). In Albania, a formal data dictionary and sharing protocol would provide schools with guidance on how to define data and give them the mandate to reject external information requests, thus encouraging both governmental and peripheral requestors to turn to Socrates for their desired information. These protocols could support the training sessions the ESC plans to organise for schools in preparation for the implementation of Socrates. Finally, ensuring that data definitions for Socrates are consistent with international definitions would make it easier to report data internationally.

Box 5.3. Common Education Data Standards in the United States

In the United States, the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) are part of a national initiative to develop a common language for education data across states, districts, and education organisations, allowing different actors to exchange and compare data in a more efficient and accurate way. The standards were developed in 2009 by the National Center for Education Statistics and a CEDS stakeholder group, which included representatives from different levels of government, higher education agencies, early childhood organisations, and others relevant stakeholders. Since its 6th version, the common standards have been developed and maintained online by an open community of users.

An increasing number of stakeholders have benefited from CEDS. Federal agencies, for example, have used CEDS to improve the quality and accuracy of their data and align their different data collection systems. Having common data definitions across the system has not only improved the accuracy with which information is transferred across the education sector, from early childhood to the workforce, but also across other sectors, such as social services or health at the local, state and national levels. The standards also provide educators, researchers and policymakers with a clear understanding of what the data mean so they can work together to improve programmes and outcomes for students.

Sources: CEDS (n.d.[36]), Why CEDS?, Common Education Data Standards, https://ceds.ed.gov/pdf/why-ceds.pdf (accessed on 23 October 2019); CEDS (n.d.[37]), Frequently Asked Questions, CEDS, https://ceds.ed.gov/FAQ.aspx (accessed on 23 October 2019).

Create quality assurance procedures to verify the accuracy of data entered

To ensure that data is of the highest quality, many countries implement strict data validation and auditing procedures (Abdul-Hamid, 2014[10]). While Albania's ministry, regional directorates and local education offices seem to conduct *ad-hoc* validations, for example by investigating discrepancies in the data they receive, these procedures are not systematised.

Establishing regular quality assurance mechanisms for EMIS data, such as visiting a sample of schools to check if independent data collection aligns with the school's data collection, and if the school's data collection aligns with the information they input into EMIS (Mclaughlin et al., 2017[36]), would help ensure that data protocols are effective and accurate. These procedures can increase the level of trust in the Socrates system, which is especially important in light of concerns that stakeholders will likely bypass the new EMIS and continue collecting and processing data using email and Excel.

A central government body should undertake the role of verifying the accuracy of data entered into Socrates to ensure consistency at the national level. One option could be for the independent Supreme State Audit (*Kontrolli i Lartë i Shtetit*) office to take on this role since it has a broad mandate to promote accountability across the public sector (Albania Supreme State Audit, n.d.[37]). Another would be to create a small team within the new Quality Assurance Agency, with a specific mandate for the quality assurance of EMIS data.

Raise the prominence of Socrates by positioning it closer to central leadership

Socrates is currently being developed by the ESC, which relative to the central ministry has better infrastructure and greater technical capacity to develop a modern EMIS. However, the ministry's MPS sector, which manages official administrative data and prepares the annual education statistical report, has not been involved in designing Socrates. Developing such a critical tool in isolation from central leadership increases the risk that Socrates will be under-utilised and that different actors will continue to collect and manage their own data. Once ESC has overseen the full development and introduction of Socrates, they should gradually prepare the ministry to take ownership of the platform.

Many education systems place responsibility for collecting, processing and disseminating education statistics within the central ministry. For example, the Romanian education ministry has a special unit within its Public Policy Department that is responsible for managing the country's Integrated Information System of Education. Serbia's Unified Information System of Education is also housed in the central ministry. Albania's MPS sector would be a logical place to store Socrates in the long term, reinforcing its mandate

to monitor the education system. The MPS sector's location under the ministry would also raise the prominence of this tool and could facilitate a greater demand for evidence in national education debates, ensuring that Socrates develops into a responsive tool that meets the data needs of policy makers. Importantly, the responsibility for managing Socrates should be clearly defined and communicated to all agencies and actors who will feed data into the system.

Build staff capacity to implement Socrates

The MPS sector will need increased technical staff capacity if it is to become responsible for the management and future development of Socrates. Currently, the Albanian MPS sector manages official administrative data with support from three individuals, only two of which are responsible for statistics. This makes it difficult for the sector to collaborate with the ESC to help finalise the development of Socrates, let alone take responsibility for establishing the platform as an effective tool for system evaluation. To make Socrates the central source of education data, Albania will need to build the capacity of technical staff and key actors across the system, in particular within the ministry. Primarily, this involves having enough people with the right skills to manage and use a fully functioning EMIS system. For example, the EMIS in Georgia employs five statisticians solely for responding to data and research requests, in addition to department leadership, administrative support and software developers who manage the system ((Li et al., 2019[38])).

Albania would benefit from employing additional staff within the ministry's MPS sector who could help liaise with the ESC and Bit Media e-Learning Solutions (the company developing the EMIS infrastructure). These individuals could also help make small fixes once the system is implemented. Specific capacities that need to be recruited or developed include software development for maintaining and improving the EMIS and quantitative analysis skills for processing data and creating thematic reports. Staff should also have training opportunities to develop their technical skills and keep up-to-date with changes in the EMIS, user needs and changing technologies (Abdul-Hamid, 2014[10]).

Recommendation 5.2.2. Develop Socrates into a functional tool to inform decision-making

Effective EMIS systems incorporate features that allow for strong analysis and reporting that can aid research and inform policy-making (Villanueva, 2003[39]). While current plans for developing Socrates include some important innovations, in particular by creating a unique student identifier that will help link databases and facilitate multi-dimensional analysis, more could be done to support dynamic analysis and generate reports that inform education policy.

For example, Albania could build different interfaces into the design of the Socrates system to better support analytical and reporting functions that can be used by policy makers, researchers and schools. Using a national identification number could also enhance Socrates's functionality as a system evaluation tool.

Create a user-friendly interface to make education data easily accessible

With the exception of a limited amount of information available through the INSTAT data portal, Albania has no user-friendly interface that allows individuals within and external to the government to explore different sources of information about the education system. Instead, users can access national education data by written request to either the ministry or relevant technical agency or by reviewing the regular publications, such as the annual

statistics yearbook on education, sports and youth. However, these publications only provide data in PDF tables and there is no way to link various sources of information together. This situation makes it difficult to raise the demand for data among different users and to conduct independent system analysis. Albania should modernise the way in which it disseminates information about the education system to different audiences.

Real-time access to data through a web portal is an increasingly common way to extract information from EMIS databases and present it in an accessible manner (Abdul-Hamid, 2017[40]). For example, the ministry should create a public dashboard containing data about the performance of the education system for general users. Within the government, a private dashboard with school-level information, such as how many students attend and performance on national assessments, could also be developed for the central ministry, technical agencies, regional directorates, local education offices and schools. The school dashboard should be an internal tool that replaces the public school performance card (see Chapter 4), which would remove the risk of unfairly ranking schools while still providing the information needed for planning purposes and to identify and disseminate good practices. Both dashboards should automatically populate information from data stored in Socrates and facilitate customised comparisons in a contextualised manner and at different aggregate levels (e.g. regional or national). The dashboards could also include data visualisation features that allow users to generate charts and figures or export data for further analysis.

Consider using a national identification number to link data across agencies

One of the most noteworthy innovations Socrates will introduce is a unique identifier that will integrate various education databases. Using unique identifiers will enhance the analytical functions of education data in Albania and provide insights to support national education goals. However, there are a few design elements the ministry should reconsider as it finalises the development of Socrates. In particular, Albania should use a national identification number rather than creating a new one just for the education system. There are several advantages to this approach. First, a civil identification number will follow a standard structure across all education databases, including vocational education and training, higher education, etc. Moreover, because it exists nationally, a civil identification number can be used to conduct research across different sectors (e.g. if one wishes to study education outcomes and labour market success). Finally, by using a civil identification number, much student information can be retrieved automatically by linking the EMIS with the national registry. This greatly improves data quality and reduces the data entry burden on schools. Of course, using civil identification numbers requires protocols about who can access data, how they can access it and when data should be anonymised to protect student privacy.

Box 5.4. The Estonian Education Information System

Estonia is known for having a sophisticated digital civil registration system. Most of the country's public services are available online and even voting can be done through a secure digital identification process that is available for all citizens via their national identity card, a mandatory document that establishes a person's identity. This personal identification system is also used in the education sector. As a result, the web-based Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) is able to link all education databases with each other and with over 20 different information systems in the country, such as the Population Register (used for example, to calculate the number of out-of-school children) and the Estonian Examination Information System.

The EHIS follows clear guidelines about how information can be accessed and presented, which helps protect personal and statistical data from being misused. In particular, access to the EHIS requires registered authorisation. Only individuals performing a duty prescribed by law and which requires information from the database are able to access personal information about students, teachers and school staff. To obtain approval, individuals must submit a written application to the Ministry of Education, setting out what data they require and how they intend to use it. These features enable the EHIS to serve as an important tool for monitoring and guiding policies in Estonia's education system.

Sources: e-Estonia (n.d.[41]), *Education,* e-Estonia, https://eestonia.com/solutions/education/ (accessed on5 November 2019); EESTi (n.d.[42]), *Education and Science,* EESTi Gateway to e-Estonia, https://www.eesti.ee/eng/services/citizen/haridus_ja_teadus/isikukaart_eesti_ee_portaali (accessed on 5 November 2019);
The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2019[43]), *Estonia Background Information*, https://www.european-agency.org/data/estonia/background-info (accessed on 18 November 2019); Lao-Peetersoo (2014[44]), *Introduction of Estonian Education Information System (EHIS),* http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/Birgit%20Lao-Peetersoo_Introduction%20to%20the%20Estonian%20Education%20Information%20System%20EHIS.pdf (accessed on 18 November, 2019); Abdul-Hamid (2017[40]), *Data for Learning: Building a Smart Education Data System*, https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1099-2.

Recommendation 5.2.3. Develop the national indicator framework to guide the development of Socrates

Albania's current education strategy includes a national indicator framework that identifies data sources related to pre-tertiary education. However, there are currently no indicators related to student learning and some indicators are not clearly defined. Moreover, targets are not systematically aligned between the main text of the strategy and the indicator framework. For example, having "95% of three- to five-year-olds in pre-school education" is a clear and measurable target referenced in the main text of the strategy but is not included in the indicator framework. Albania needs to develop a national indicator framework that aligns with the education strategy and draws on information from across the system, especially student learning outcomes. Mapping the indicator framework against available sources of information can help identify information gaps and signal a need for Socrates to improve data collection in order to better measure progress. This can also help improve accountability for system performance and co-ordinate policy efforts.

Introduce indicators and targets that focus on student learning

The current strategy's indicator framework narrowly focuses on inputs and outputs. For example, under the "quality and inclusive learning" objective, indicators include the number of schools equipped with ICT labs and the number of students who leave school early but there are no references to learning outcomes. Considering the large share of students in Albania who do not master basic competencies, including an indicator based on outcomes could be a better way to help measure this objective. While input and output indicators are appropriate measures for some parts of the indicator framework, this review

strongly recommends that Albania establish precise outcome indicators on student learning and associate these with achievable targets. This can help ensure that different stakeholders recognise learning as a national priority and keep policy makers accountable for improving student outcomes. The ministry could, for example, consider introducing targets on:

- **Reducing the share of students not reaching minimum competency levels in numeracy and literacy.** In the short term, since Albania's national assessment does not enable reliable system-level comparisons, data from international assessments, such as TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA, can serve as indicators to monitor student performance. For example, setting a target to reduce the share of low performers (below PISA Level 2) to less than 15% by 2030 would align with the EU and UN focus on ensuring all students acquire basic skills (European Commission, 2018[45]). In the medium term, the VANAF should also be used to track this target.
- **Reducing the gap in student learning between population sub-groups.** Considering the evidence of educational inequalities across different groups of students (see Chapter 1), it is promising that Albania disaggregates enrolment rates by gender, disability and ethnic minority population (Roma and Balkan Egyptian). However, the national indicator framework should include information on student performance with the goal of reducing achievement gaps among student groups and between rural and urban areas. This information could be collected through the background questionnaires of Albania's national assessments and exams.

These indicators and targets require reliable national and international assessment tools to tack progress over time. Albania should strengthen its national assessment (see Policy issue 5.3) and data collection tools to capture a wider range of contextual information about student background, such as socio-economic status, national minority group (e.g. ethnic minority populations, non-native Albanian speakers) and special education needs. This would support in-depth analysis and strategic planning to address equity issues.

Use the national indicator framework to prioritise data collection for Socrates

In addition to monitoring student learning outcomes, the ministry could develop a stable national indicator framework to identify data gaps to help orient the future development of Socrates. If, for example, the ministry sets a system goal to improve the retention of students from ethnic minority groups, the national indicator framework would indicate data on student ethnicity needs to be collected and added to Socrates. If Socrates currently does not hold such data, or if such data is poorly collected, EMIS staff would prioritise developing capacity and data collection procedures to support the monitoring of this indicator. The indicator framework could also incorporate data related to student achievement, the teaching profession and school performance, which can provide valuable insights for system evaluation. Reporting against indicators from the framework in an education report would also support public accountability and create pressure to ensure that any data gaps are addressed.

Policy issue 5.3. Ensuring the national assessment supports system goals

Albania introduced the VANAF national assessment to support system monitoring, implement the new curriculum and help improve student learning. However, the lack of standardised marking and moderation processes mean the results are not comparable at the system level. As a result, Albania currently does not have a reliable external measure of

learning outcomes until students take the PISA assessment at age 15. While data from TIMSS and PIRLS will soon be available to help monitor learning outcomes in earlier grades, international assessments cannot measure how well students are meeting the national curriculum standards. This information is not available until students take the State Matura Examination in Grade 12. As a priority, Albania should align the design and implementation of its national assessment system in order to better support system goals.

Once a reliable assessment instrument has been established, the ministry will need to work with the ESC to improve the way in which assessment results are disseminated. This is especially important because Albania's national assessment is census-based. While census assessments are more expensive to implement than sample-based ones, research shows that having an externally validated measure of learning for each student can help identify and address achievement gaps and act as a reference for teachers' classroom marking (OECD, 2013[1]). However, Albania's current practice of producing a single national report that ranks schools based on their aggregate results does not support these broader functions. Improving the dissemination of national assessment results by making relevant and contextualised comparisons and creating reporting structures that target the different interests of students, parents, teachers and schools can help Albania leverage the potential of this important evaluation tool.

Recommendation 5.3.1. Align the national assessment with its stated purpose of system monitoring

Albania has clearly defined the purpose of each assessment that students take along their school trajectory. The stated purpose of the VANAF is to help upgrade the skills, knowledge and know-how of students; monitor and control the implementation of the curriculum; and inform students, parents and educational institutions about student achievements (MoESY, 2018[13]). While these objectives are in line with the purpose of national assessments in many OECD and EU countries, the current design and marking of the VANAF do not support such a broad purpose. In particular, the lack of standardised marking and moderation processes mean the results cannot be compared nationally. This undermines the VANAF's reliability as a system-monitoring tool. Moreover, the VANAF has potential as a census-based assessment to serve a formative function by helping schools and teachers to identify and support struggling students. However, the decision not to implement the national assessment in Grade 3 represents a missed opportunity to identify and address achievement gaps earlier, before they become problematic. This section discusses some of the changes that Albania could consider to more closely align the VANAF with its joint purpose of serving as a system-monitoring tool and a formative resource for teachers and schools. The analysis is guided by a set of key considerations, outlined in Table 5.5, which any country needs to review when determining the design of a national assessment.

Table 5.5. Key decisions regarding national assessments

Topic	Options	Advantages	Disadvantages
Subjects	Many	Broader coverage of skills assessed	More expensive to develop, not all students might be prepared to take all subjects
	Few	Cheaper to develop, subjects are generalisable to a larger student population	More limited coverage of skills assessed
Target population	Sample	Cheaper and faster to implement	Results can only be produced at high, aggregate levels
	Census	Results can be produced for individual students and schools	More expensive and slower to implement
Grade level	Lower	Skills can be diagnosed and improved at an early stage of education	The length of the assessment and the types of questions that can be asked are limited
	Upper	More flexibility with respect to the length of the assessment and the types of questions that are asked	Skills cannot be evaluated until students are in later stages of education
Scoring type	Criterion-referenced	Results are comparable across different administration	Results require expertise to scale and are difficult to interpret
	Norm-referenced	Results are easier to scale and interpret	Results are only comparable within one administration of the assessment
Item type	Closed-ended	Cheaper and faster to implement, items are more accurately marked	Can only measure a limited number of skills
	Open-ended	A broader set of skills can be measured	More expensive and slower to implement, marking is more subjective in nature
Testing mode	Paper	The processes are already in place and the country is familiar with them, requires no additional capital investment	Results are produced more slowly, seen as more old-fashioned
	Computer	Results are produced more quickly, more cost-effective in the long-term, seen as more modern	New processes have to be developed and communicated, requires significant initial capital investment

Source: Adapted from DFID (2011[46]), *National and international assessment of student achievement: a DFID practice paper*, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67619/nat-int-assess-stdnt-ach.pdf (accessed on 13 July 2018); OECD (2011[47]), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en.

Review the target population and grade levels

Considering Albania's national assessment has stated purposes to support system monitoring and improve the "skills, knowledge and know-how of students," this review recommends that the ministry reconsider its decision not to pursue an assessment of student learning in an earlier grade. This is because the consolidation of a child's cognitive skills in the early years of primary school is essential for their future learning. For this reason, many OECD countries assess student learning in at least one grade of primary school to identify issues in students' learning before they become problematic and track progress overtime. Waiting until the end of primary school (in Grade 5 when students are around 10- or 11-years-old) to reliably collect external data about student learning is too late if the instrument intends to sever a formative purpose by helping teachers and schools identify and address learning gaps. This review recommends the Albanian ministry maintain the VANAF in Grade 5 but also introduce a census-based national assessment in Grade 3. This configuration of Albania's assessment framework would provide information on student learning to support system monitoring across different stages of the pre-tertiary education system (see Table 5.6).

- **Introduce a census-based national assessment in Grade 3**. A full-cohort national assessment in Grade 3 would provide valuable insights about student learning at a stage of education where there is currently no comparable information about the extent to which students in Albania are meeting curriculum standards. A census assessment in this grade would give students time to adjust to formal schooling but still give schools and teachers a chance to address achievement gaps early on. The design of the Grade 3 assessment should be appropriate for young learners and could incorporate test items that link the assessment to the Grade 5 level. This type of vertical linking or scaling would show student progress over time against a common measurement scale across the third and fifth grades.
- **Maintain a census-based national assessment in Grade 5**. This review supports maintaining the VANAF as a census-based national assessment in Grade 5 since this marks the end of primary school and provides data to help better understand the quality of learning that takes place during this stage of the education cycle.

While census-based assessments can serve as accountability measures, it is important to communicate to parents, teachers and other actors that Albania's national assessment is for system monitoring and formative purposes only. In neighbouring North Macedonia, for example, the government had to eliminate its national assessment in 2017 because it was being used unfairly to determine teacher salaries based on how closely classroom marks corresponded to students' national assessment results (OECD, 2019[48]). While the VANAF can serve a formative function by giving teachers an external reference point to help moderate or benchmark their classroom assessment, attaching high stakes to the results should be avoided. This is a concern in Albania since the ESC, regional directorates and local education offices rank schools according to average scores. Improving the way in which results are disseminated and used can help reduce the risk of negative consequences for students, teachers and schools (see Recommendation 5.3.2).

Table 5.6. Proposal for national assessment framework in Albania

Grades	Assessment	Frequency	Population	Subjects	Primary purposes
Grade 3	National assessment	1 or 2 year cycle	Census	Mathematics and Albanian language	System monitoring and formative
Grade 4	TIMSS/PIRLS (international assessments)*	4/5 year cycle*	Sample	Mathematics, science and reading	System monitoring
Grade 5	National assessment (VANAF)	Annual	Census	Mathematics, science and Albanian language	System monitoring and formative
Grade 9	National Basic Education Examination	Annual	Census	Mathematics, Albanian language (or mother tongue) and foreign language**	Student certification
	PISA (international assessment)	3 year cycle	Sample	Mathematics, science, reading	System monitoring
Grade 12 (depends on programme)	State Matura Examination	Annual	Census	Mathematics, Albanian language and literature, foreign language and one elective (see Chapter 2)	Student selection and certification

Note: This table is based on recommendations from across this review. It aggregates proposed, current and planned sources of information on student learning that can be used for system monitoring and formative use in schools.
*Albania will participate in TIMSS and PIRLS for the first time in 2019 and 2021, respectively.
**National minority language students are assessed in mother tongue, Albanian language and mathematics on the National Basic Education Examination. They also have an option to take a foreign language subject.
Source: Authors; MoESY (2018[13]), *Country Background Report: Albania*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Standardise marking of the national assessments

Reliability is an essential feature of assessments used to monitor learning outcomes at the system level and over time. Highly reliable assessments ensure that particular assessors and marking procedures do not influence the results of the test (OECD, 2013[1]). In Albania, the content of the VANAF is standardised but the marking does not meet high-quality standards. Schools are responsible for administering the national assessment but marking is done by local education offices, which often struggle to attract the most experienced teachers to do this work. The main reasons for this have been that teachers do not receive remuneration for marking the national assessment and this responsibility is not recognised within the teaching career structure. There are also are no moderation processes to validate the consistency of marking. As a result, the VANAF does not provide accurate information that can highlight differences in student learning across the country.

This review strongly recommends that Albania introduce the same rigorous external marking or moderation procedures for its national assessment as is standard practice in most OECD countries. Concretely, this means transferring the responsibility of marking the VANAF Grade 5 and the future Grade 3 assessment to the ESC, which is investing in the infrastructure to mark State Matura exams electronically. This technology could also be used to mark the national assessments. For questions that cannot be evaluated using technology, assessors should be selected and certified according to strict criteria and their marking moderated (e.g. joint marking, sampled second marking). The ministry should consider introducing incentives for individuals to take on these additional responsibilities, which could help ensure that both the delivery and marking of these tests meet high-quality standards. Such changes will require additional resources and capacity for the ESC.

Consider electronic marking and moving to computer-based delivery in the future

The use of computers to administer national assessments is becoming more common, particularly in countries that introduced a national assessment recently (OECD, 2013[1]). Compared to paper-based delivery, computer-based testing has several advantages. It tends to be cheaper to administer (aside from the initial capital investment), delivers results more quickly and is less prone to human error and integrity breaches. Albania has begun marking the State Matura exam electronically and should use this technology to mark national assessments as well, which would help standardise the marking process. As the country endeavours to modernise its education system, the ministry and the ESC might also consider delivering national assessments using computers in the future. However, this will require significant financial investments and should be seen as a long-term goal. Albania's experience administering the PISA 2018 test via computers was a major challenge, and the ESC had to loan computers to schools in order for students to take the test. PISA is a sample-based assessment so the prospect of delivering the VANAF or Grade 3 assessment to a full cohort of students seems unrealistic in the immediate future.

As such, Albania should focus on improving and establishing reliable paper-based assessment instruments in Grades 3 and 5 that can be marked electronically using a combination of automatic marking and human on-screen marking to score tests. Then, when resources allow, a digital assessment that mimics the paper version could be established. Research should be conducted to compare results between the two delivery methods at this stage. Finally, the ministry and the ESC should raise awareness to prepare schools and students for implementing an entirely digital national assessment before the instrument is fully introduced.

Maintain focus on foundation skills but consider adding items to the Grade 5 subject tests

Focusing the national assessment on a limited number of subjects can generate data to help strengthen the foundational skills of students. Albania's current national assessment in Grade 5 tests students in mathematics, Albanian language and science using an integrated test of 50 questions to cover the curriculum (only 10 of which are science questions). The total score of the integrated test may provide a sufficiently reliable estimate of student achievement if performance on different subject tests is positively correlated. However, the current number of questions for each subject measured by the VANAF is unlikely to fully measure all domains of the Grade 5 maths, reading and science curriculum. As such, Albania should consider extending the number of items for each subject test in the Grade 5 national assessment to help collect more reliable information about how well students meet curriculum standards. Another way to increase the curriculum coverage of the national assessment is to use a matrix sampling method, whereby different content is included in different sets of test booklets (OECD, 2013[1]). This approach allows for broader coverage of the curriculum without increasing testing time but would undermine the diagnostic value of the census-based instrument since students would not be tested in the same material.

The subjects assessed in the Grade 3 assessment should also focus on foundational skills, namely numeracy and literacy. There is no need for a science assessment at this stage because the students are very young and will have limited subject knowledge.

Set a realistic timetable to introduce national assessments

This review recommends that Albania work toward establishing a census-based assessment in Grades 3 and 5 on an annual basis. While this may not be immediately feasible considering the significant costs and staff capacity required to conduct annual census-based assessments, Albania already conducts the VANAF Grade 5 assessment annually and it is unclear why the ministry decided to forgo the assessment in Grade 3. Albania should use results from the 2014-15 pilot study to inform a realistic timetable for introducing the Grade 3 assessment. The implementation plan should allow adequate time to prepare education actors and the public for the new assessment, which can help avoid the perception that it will have stakes for students, teachers and schools. To reduce the pressure on resources and staff capacity in the short term, Albania could gradually introduce the Grade 3 assessment on a rotating or alternating basis with Grade 5. Many countries use this approach to implement their national assessments (OECD, 2013[1]). However, this should be part of a longer term system monitoring goal to generate reliable and timely information about learning outcomes in both grades on an annual basis.

Collect more contextual information about factors that impact student learning

Albania participates in international assessments that include background questionnaires for teachers, school principals, students and parents. However, the set of proxies used to capture factors that influence student learning in national assessments are limited. The VANAF currently has a 12-question student background questionnaire that allows data to be disaggregated by gender, type of school (public/private) and geographic area (urban/rural), but there are no proxies for socio-economic status. This review recommends that Albania review the structure and content of the VANAF background questionnaire to ensure it responds to research questions that can help inform education policy. For example, considering Albania's education strategy aims to improve inclusion, the country could revise its own background questionnaires to collect more robust information on student

background, such as parental education level (a proxy for socio-economic status), special education needs, and national minority group (e.g. ethnic minority populations, non-native Albanian speakers). Teacher and school questionnaires could also provide insights on some of the contextual factors that influence student learning, such as whether results represent a satellite or multi-grade school. Albania could use questionnaires from TIMSS and PISA as models to adapt and enhance their own background questionnaires.

Recommendation 5.3.2. Improve the dissemination of national assessment results to support system goals

Albania chose to develop a census-based national assessment in order to monitor the learning of all students. Considering the resource demands related to this type of assessment and in order to ensure that results can help improve teaching and learning, it is critical to optimise the national assessment for interested parties by communicating findings in an appropriate form (Kellaghan, Grenaney and Murray, 2009[49]). While strengthening the reliability and design of the VANAF should be Albania's top priority, the ministry and ESC should also consider how to most effectively report the results from the national assessments in Grades 3 and 5. This must be done with caution to avoid potentially negative consequences, such as attaching stakes to the assessment.

In Albania, the ESC currently prepares an annual national report on VANAF results. This includes several components that are essential for disseminating the findings of national assessments. Namely, the report sets the context of the assessment by highlighting its relevance for policy objectives and the framework for its design and methodology. Next, it provides a description of achievement results, trend data and correlations by gender, school type and geographic location. However, the report also ranks schools according to aggregate student scores without any contextualised information, which is unfair and unreliable since the assessment is not marked in a way that allows for comparisons across the country. Importantly, this is the only tool used to communicate VANAF results with the public and data is only accessible in PDF tables. To optimise the potential of the VANAF, the ministry and the ESC should create tailored reports that target different audiences, such as parents, teachers, schools and the general public. This could leverage the assessment's potential to inform education policy and help achieve national learning goals. However, the ministry and the ESC should avoid using decontextualised results as an accountability measure, as this could have negative consequences.

Keep the national report but identify different benchmarks for comparisons

Census-based testing generates data that allows schools to compare their average performance with other schools. This level of comparison might not be the most relevant since this approach often results in schools with the greatest concentration of students from more advantaged backgrounds continually being considered the most effective. It also undermines the potential formative function of these assessments. Instead of limiting the unit of analysis to individual schools, several different benchmarks can be identified against which schools can compare themselves more meaningfully (Kellaghan, Grenaney and Murray, 2009[49]). For example, it would be more appropriate to compare a school's national assessment results to other schools that are located in the same regional directorate (see Recommendation 5.1.2), or have similar student populations (i.e. students with similar socio-economic backgrounds) or structures (i.e. comparing multi-grade schools with each other). Aggregate averages of schools from these categories can allow individual schools to measure themselves against more relevant performance benchmarks. Based on the body of international evidence and the education environment in Albania, this review

recommends that schools are no longer ranked solely according to their average results in the VANAF report. Instead, information about school-level national assessment results should be presented alongside contextualised information about the school and student population. This contextualised information can be included in the national report but also in the school performance dashboard of Socrates (see Recommendation 5.2.2).

Create reporting structures that maximise the formative value of national assessment

Census-based testing enables the ESC to generate reports at several different levels of the education system (OECD, 2013[1]). In addition to the national report of assessment results for system monitoring, the ESC could create different reports for diverse audiences to align Albania's national assessment with its stated purpose of informing a range of stakeholders about student achievement. Developing and disseminating these reports will require additional resources and capacity so central planning should budget this work accordingly.

- **Student reports.** These should compare a student's performance to national, municipal and other relevant benchmarks. Since one of the main purposes of the current assessments is to provide reliable feedback about student learning to schools and teachers, care should be taken concerning how results are provided to students and parents to avoid the perception that the results carry stakes.

  Students and parents should be informed about individual student results as part of the regular parent-teacher meetings. Teachers might be provided national guidance on how to present the results. For example, teachers might discuss the results within broad categories of meeting or not meeting national expectations, rather than focusing solely on specific scores.

- **Reports for teachers.** These should contain item-level analysis with information about how their students performed on each item and the competencies those items assessed. This information should be presented alongside contextualised comparison groups, such as gender and municipalities. To further support the assessment's formative function, the results might also analyse common errors that students made, with suggestions on how to improve teaching of that content.

- **School-level reports**. These should present the performance of an individual school with relevant benchmarks for comparisons. For example, a school report might compare performance to the national and regional averages or with schools operating in similar contexts. Importantly, care should be taken to ensure that school-level performance on the national assessment supports information transparency and does not become a narrow accountability measure.

Table of recommendations

Policy issue	Recommendation	Action item
5.1. Establishing the processes and capacity needed to conduct system evaluation	5.1.1. Integrate evaluation processes into the future strategy	Prioritise a select number of challenges and goals to focus the education strategy
		Clearly present evidence to justify the education system's top challenges
		Include precise targets in the indicator framework
		Develop more detailed implementation plans
	5.1.2. Develop the capacity to conduct system evaluation	Co-ordinate monitoring and evaluation responsibilities at the central level
		Ensure evaluation bodies have the resources needed to achieve their mandates
		Strengthen regional capacity for evaluation and improve accountability for educational quality
	5.1.3. Report on the quality of education regularly and promote the use of evidence to inform policy-making	Regularly publish an analytical report about the education system
		Embed the use of evidence in the policy-making process
5.2. Modernising the education management information system	5.2.1. Address gaps in the development of Socrates and establish it as the central source of education data	Establish protocols for data definition, collection and retrieval from schools
		Create quality assurance procedures to verify the accuracy of data entered
		Raise the prominence of Socrates by positioning it closer to central leadership
		Build staff capacity to implement Socrates
	5.2.2. Develop Socrates into a functional tool to inform decision-making	Create a user-friendly interface to make education data easily accessible
		Consider using a national identification number to link data across agencies
	5.2.3. Develop the national indicator framework to guide the development of Socrates	Introduce indicators and targets that focus on student learning
		Use the national indicator framework to prioritise data collection for Socrates
5.3. Ensuring the national assessment supports system goals	5.3.1. Align the national assessment with its stated purpose of system monitoring	Review the target population and grade levels
		Standardise marking of the national assessments
		Consider electronic marking and moving to computer-based delivery in the future
		Maintain focus on foundation skills but consider adding items to the Grade 5 subject tests
		Set a realistic timetable to introduce national assessments
		Collect more contextual information about factors that impact student learning
	5.3.2. Improve the dissemination of national assessment results to support system goals	Keep the national report but identify different benchmarks for comparisons
		Create reporting structures that maximise the formative value of national assessment

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ISBN 978-92-64-76480-4

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