

Outcomes of the Working Session III

“Internal and external evaluation: towards a continuum”

Internal and external evaluation are parts of a comprehensive quality assurance system that leads school to development, to become a learning organization, leads into the direction of increasing the quality of education offered to community members and community at large.

This workshop focused on the relationship between internal and external evaluation and stimulated the participants to share their opinions and experiences in order to address the following topics:

1. Is there a relationship between internal and external evaluation? Is their role seen as a complementary one into the direction of a quality improvement process that sustain school to give a “better response” to a growing demand of society/ labour market?
2. Could the same criteria be used in internal and external evaluation?
3. Could the effects on students’ outcomes already be seen, in the context of increasingly developed quality assurance systems?
4. Has the economic crisis any impact on internal and / or external evaluation?

Findings:

On the first topic, everybody agreed that there is a growing relationship between internal and external evaluation, both characterized by: transparency (methods, judgment criteria, instruments and results), objectiveness (evidence based judgment, criteria based on strong points and weak points) and taking into consideration all relevant stakeholders.

In some cases, **external evaluation follows internal evaluation** and starts from / relies on its results and from the improvement plan that school decided to implement; in other cases, **internal evaluation follows external evaluation** (which shows where are “elements” that need to be improved) and could sustain school in monitoring the development of the improvement plan in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and / or new objectives.

Taking into consideration that in some countries external evaluation is rather a new phenomenon and in other cases internal evaluation has just started or has to start, one of the challenges of this moment is to **build a mutual trust** between internal and external evaluation, to increase the understanding and the acceptance of each other, to promote the benefits that both bring to school development. In this way, internal evaluation will/could rely on the external evaluation objectivity and on the fact that there will be no immediate repercussions in case of “bad results”. External evaluation will/could come in longer sequences, if internal evaluation is

credible and shows good results.

This can be achieved by:

- **adjusting the frequency of the external evaluation** visits on the results showed by the internal evaluation;
- **strengthening the internal evaluation** - schools/ training institutions and teachers/ trainers must have **time, tools and training** for being able to reflect on themselves, make credible analysis of strong points and weak points of their institutions and find their own "road" of self-improvement.

Potential solutions:

- increase collaboration and cooperation between schools to create / sustain schools networking on national and European level, that allows them to share tools and good practices on internal evaluation;
- encourage partnerships in order to develop peer-learning activities;
- encourage teachers/ trainers to access Lifelong Learning Programme for acquiring new knowledge and competences.

On the second topic, there are various approaches / opinions regarding the use of the same criteria in internal and external evaluation:

- Criteria should / could be the same. In this regard, internal improvement efforts are in line with aims/goals at national level and external evaluation could give a clear picture on the objectivity of the internal evaluation;
- Criteria should / must be different. In this regard, internal evaluation has to be a school reflective process, to allow school community to know themselves better, to have the freedom in choosing ways to improve.

Potential solution: Fix a specific set of criteria to be followed both in internal and external evaluation at national level, and to allow schools to add specific criteria to their internal evaluation. These specific criteria could give them a broader and deeper understanding of their social, economical and cultural background and meet their specific needs.

On the third topic, everybody agreed that in most countries it is too early to see the effects of internal and external evaluation on students' outcomes, in terms of academic achievements as well as social and personal developments. This is because the quality assurance systems aren't mature yet and reliable data aren't available. A positive effect could be seen on students, parents, employers satisfaction (climate, safety, teacher's evaluation), and on early school dropout.

On the fourth topic, discussions showed that in most countries budgets were cut down and this had an effect on external evaluation especially,

local councils have decreased funds for this activity.

Potential solution (on short term): to encourage school partnerships in order to develop peer - review activities in the same time with external evaluation.

We may conclude by saying that internal and external evaluation must be seen as inseparable parts of a comprehensive quality assurance system, as a continuum into the school life. The challenge at present is to **build mutual trust** between them. In this regard, internal evaluation needs to be strengthened by:

- increasing the collaboration and the cooperation between schools, in order to create / sustain schools networking on national and European level;
- encouraging partnerships in order to develop peer-learning activities;
- maximizing the access of teachers /trainers for training by Lifelong Learning Programme.

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