Study visits on external and internal school evaluation

Findings from Study Visits in Hamburg and Vilnius

Vilnius (LT) group no 62, 27.09-01.10.2010

Hamburg (DE) group no 66, 29.11-03.12.2010

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1   INTRODUCTION

Schools and training institutions face a number of pressures from society; they must provide education to a standard which satisfies both the demands of the education and training systems and of the labour market. They must also contribute to a range of social objectives, such as equality of opportunity and inclusion targets. Despite schools having an increasing range of functions and goals to meet, there is a clear trend towards a less centralised school administration and governance, with many schools and training institutions achieving greater levels of autonomy. Understandably, this situation has increased the need for evaluation and Europe has therefore witnessed an increase in the development and improvement of new or existing monitoring and evaluation systems; today, the evaluation of school performance and the assessment of quality of delivery takes place in almost all European education and training systems.

This trend of greater levels of autonomy and evaluation activity is aligned to European policy developments on the evaluation of schools and training institutions; European level discussions on quality assurance started formally in 2000 with the launch of the European Forum on Quality. Improving the quality of education and training was designated as one of the priority areas in the Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001 and its follow-up, the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) adopted by the Council in May 2009. The Council of the European Union in its conclusions on ET2020 stressed its goals: *"improving the quality and efficiency of education and training requires improving quality of teaching, governance and leadership of educational and training institutions and the development of effective quality assurance systems."*

The Study Visits programme, coordinated by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), is contributing to the above mentioned EU policy goals by supporting study visits on quality assurance for education and training specialists and practitioners from across Europe. For example, in the academic year 2010/2011, 16 visits are taking place under the theme 'quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions' and a further five are focused upon the theme; 'measures to improve efficiency in education and training institutions'[1].

This particular report is a summary of observations and lessons identified by 21 education and evaluation experts from across Europe who attended one of the study visits on external and internal school evaluation in Autumn 2010, either in Hamburg or Vilnius. The two study visits provided a peer learning opportunity for both hosts and participants; participants learned about the systems and practice of evaluation in the host country and also from their fellow participants.

Both study visits took place in countries that have very recently introduced a system of external evaluation. The Vilnius (LT) study visit (Group No. 62) took place between 27 September and 1 October 2010 and was attended by 12 experts from Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Spain. The visit focused upon presenting the new Lithuanian external evaluation model. The participants also had a chance to see how individual schools and training institutions are embracing the practice of self-evaluation.

The Hamburg (DE) visit (Group No. 66) took place between 29 November and 3 December 2010 and it was attended by a total of nine experts from Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania and Spain. The visit introduced the new system of

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[1] Study visit group reports are available online at www.studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu

Cedefop also organised a synthesis seminar from 1 February until 2 February 2010 in Thessaloniki on `*Quality and efficiency of education and training: Findings from study visits 2008/09*'. The outcomes of the seminar are available online at http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?cid=3&artid=7170 &scid=77&artlang=EN&per_id=2532 and serve as a basis for the publication '*Better competences through better teaching and leading: Findings from study visits 2008/09*' published online at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/16385.aspx (July 2010).

external evaluation in the Federal State of Hamburg[2]; the evaluation system in Hamburg has been in place for four years and is now reaching the end of the first round. The study visit also demonstrated how the educational monitoring data in Hamburg is used for evaluation and quality improvement and the type of support that is available for schools to improve quality. On site visits to schools and training institutions gave the chance to participants to observe both well established and more innovative approaches to self-evaluation that have been adopted by education and training providers in Hamburg.

This report can be read in conjunction with the background paper prepared for these two visits. Group reports of other study visits on the same topic that provide information on the practice of external and internal school evaluation in Europe can be found on-line.

This report is divided into following sections:

- The next chapter (second) provides a summary of the findings during the visits on external evaluation

- The third chapter summarises the key findings on internal / (self-)evaluation

- The fourth chapter discusses the growing relationship between internal and external evaluation and the way in which some schools and training institutions are moving towards embracing the concept of quality management

2 FINDINGS ON EXTERNAL SCHOOL EVALUATION

The following observations were made during the two study visits about the practice of external school evaluation in Europe.

2.1 School evaluation is a practice of growing importance and policy focus

The study visits confirmed that there is an increased emphasis on school evaluation in Europe. This is accompanied by a growing recognition that school evaluation can provide a means to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of a school and, that it forms an important part of the process of quality assurance. Effective school evaluation has the potential of providing an informed basis for future school improvement.

The visits also demonstrated that school evaluation undergoes a process of reform in many countries across Europe. In some countries this reform encompasses changes to the evaluation systems that have been in place for several decades. In others this involves introducing completely new systems.

For example, in Hamburg, the first round of school evaluation is just coming to an end. An **institute for school monitoring, IFBM** (*Institut für Bildungsmonitoring*), was established in 2006 to carry out school evaluation and the first school visits were carried out in 2007. Its system of evaluation is focussed on school processes. The philosophy of '**better school processes lead to better outcomes for pupils**' is at the heart of the new system and the ultimate goal is to help schools become learning organisations in which quality improvement is a continuous process. Other key characteristics of the system are: objective, criteria based judgment of strengths and weaknesses; transparency of methods and judgmental criteria; professional and appreciative cooperation with schools; and confidentiality and discretion.

In Lithuania, the current system of external evaluation dates back to 2001 when the World Bank funded a national programme on education. One of the most successful strands of the programme was school improvement and the **National Agency for School Evaluation (NMVA)** was established in 2005 as a means of taking the issue of school improvement forward. Its purpose is to evaluate the quality of education activities in schools and to provide schools with

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[2] Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg *(Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg)* is the second largest city and the second smallest Federal State in Germany.

methodological assistance and guidance for improving quality of school activities in self-evaluation. The Agency conducted the first external evaluation in 2007.

External evaluation is also a new practice in countries like Poland, Portugal and Romania. In Poland the system has been in operation just over a year while in Romania the introduction of external evaluation dates back to 2005. The first working party on external evaluation of schools in Portugal was formed in 2006 and the country is also in the process of conducting the first round of evaluation in schools. In Germany it was the first PISA results which acted as a stimulus for politicians to devote more funding to school improvement.

On the contrary, the external evaluation system of France has been operating several decades, though new instructions were introduced in 2009; there is a conscious effort to try and combine individual evaluation with team evaluation. The external quality assurance system has a long tradition in Flanders too where it was introduced in 1991; a third round of inspections is underway now.

2.2   Methods for external quality assurance

The two study visits focussed on two principal methods of external quality assurance: external school evaluation and inspections[3]. With regards to **inspections**, local or national authorities in many countries have a legal duty to provide high quality education in their schools, and a wide range of other responsibilities (e.g. utilise public funds in an appropriate manner) which, if they are to be exercised effectively, require them to monitor their schools. For these reasons they organise regular visits (referred to as inspections in this report) to schools and VET institutions to check compliance with legal requirements, for example, curriculum is followed as specified by law, attainment targets are met and that funding is used appropriately. This is usually a top-down arrangement with the main goal of ensuring (controlling/supervising) that schools are doing what they are supposed to do.

For example, in Estonia it is the task of the state inspection service to control teaching and educational activities and compliance with the legal framework. In Flanders (Belgium), the Flemish Community Inspectorate conducts school inspections/audits to which each school is subject every four to six years. An inspection will include an assessment of the extent to which the school meets its legal obligations and reach attainment targets set for each education level by the Flemish Parliament, and whether the funds provided by the Flemish community are being best utilised.

School visits are also carried out for the purpose of **external evaluation**, having as an objective to move beyond supervision and focus on school improvement that can lead to better outcomes for students. For example, the new Lithuanian system of external evaluation is fundamentally different from the inspection system, which was abolished in July 2010. The external evaluation system operated by the National Agency for School Evaluation is focussed on "the evaluation of the processes in schools"[4] with the ultimately goal of supporting school improvement, while the purpose of inspections was to supervise school's compliance with legislation. One of the study visit participants described the differences between the two in the following way: 'The vision of the Agency is to change the culture of evaluation from fear to attitude, from compliance to improvement, instruction to agreement, opinions to evidence and from control to reflection'.

Similar principles apply to Saxony where *Sächsisches Bildungsinstitut* (SBI), which is in charge of external evaluation of schools and training institutions, is seen by its employees as a service provider, not as an authority. They do not want school evaluation to be seen as a form of control, instead it serves the purpose of reinforcing school autonomy and assisting with improvement.

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[3] This section is not a comprehensive list of external quality assurance methods used to ensure the quality of European schools and training institutions. Instead it focuses on those that were discussed during the two study visits. Others, such as those related to audits and accreditation, are not discussed in this report.

[4] Lithuanian Minister of Education and Science, 2 April 2007: Methodology of external audit of comprehensive schools

In some countries <u>the external quality assurance system is supported by pedagogical guidance and advice services</u>. For example, alongside the Flemish inspection service operates the service of pedagogical advisers. Pedagogical advisers are employed to support schools with school improvement activities and with the professional development of teachers and head teachers. The activities of pedagogical advisers and inspectors are clearly defined and without any overlap. The advisory service is an independent service; this helps schools to trust the advisers.

In some countries three separate agencies are in charge of the three types of functions related to external quality assurance (control, evaluation and advice/support). These include Germany (Hamburg), Poland and Romania. As an example, in Hamburg the ministry of education is in charge of compliance and accountability, the department for quality assurance is concerned with outcomes and support for schools (i.e. for internal evaluation) and the institute for school monitoring is responsible for evaluation of processes at school and classroom levels. In Poland the external quality assurance system has been divided into three types of activity since 2009 (control / evaluation / support). In Flanders, until 1991, one person was responsible for both carrying out school inspections and providing advice for schools. The Decree of 1991 however divided this quality assurance model into two parts (inspections and pedagogical advice).

In France and Spain inspectors are in charge of all three elements (control / evaluation / support), although evaluation tends to be by far the most important element. This can be a challenging system for inspectors as there is typically some tension felt as regards to their role as both supervisors (control) and advisors. In Hamburg it has been made clear that it is not the role of external evaluators to counsel or to support schools in their improvement processes as they see their services as separate from those of advisers and supervisors.

Other methods are also used to support external quality assurance efforts. In some countries external quality assurance refers to the <u>evaluation of teachers</u>. For example, the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture has the task of conducting school and teacher evaluation; however, no real practice of school evaluation has been developed to date. Instead, teachers are subject to evaluation. Teachers are evaluated at the end of each academic year[5]. The evaluation result is based on a bi-annual observation by an evaluator and forms filled in by the teacher, principal and evaluator. Teachers are also evaluated in France every four years.

<u>Thematic evaluation</u> is another form of external evaluation used by some Member States (i.e. Estonia, Lithuania and the Netherlands). Thematic evaluation is usually complementary to external evaluation and/or inspections. In Estonia, for instance, around 10% of schools are subject to external thematic evaluation each year. Topics of recent thematic assessments include teachers' qualifications, methods for supporting pupil's progression and the impact of preventive early school leaving measures.

<u>Standardised tests</u> in education are used by the Member States as a basis for school comparison and to offer a picture of student achievement in the country, region, city and/or school. Especially when appropriately interpreted to reflect socio-economic characteristics of pupil populations, results can be used by education authorities, for example, to serve diagnostic purposes, to evaluate effectiveness of educational programmes and to improve the allocation of human and financial resources. Information from assessments is used to a varying degree for a purpose of external evaluation. In Walloon (the French speaking part of Belgium), external evaluation is mainly based on the analysis of tests results (French, maths and science). In Hamburg, (mostly) national attainment tests (*Lernstandserhebungen*) are undertaken by pupils in years 3, 6 and 8 in German, Mathematics and English. Baseline and Value-added Tests (*Lernausgangslagenuntersuchungen*/*Lern-entwicklungsuntersuchungen*) are taken every two years at the secondary level (mainly years 5 to 7). Although many of the test results are available for schools, the expertise of schools in Hamburg in using data for school improvement varies strongly. The results are not used for external school evaluation. In the Netherlands and Romania tests are taken at the end of lower secondary education and are a brand new practice in Catalonia.

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[5] Also new teachers looking for a permanent contract are subject to an evaluation by an inspector and the promotion of vice-principles is subject to an evaluation by two inspectors.

There is no national or regional system of external or internal school evaluation in Norway. Instead, the Norwegian government has assigned municipalities with the responsibility to monitor the results of national tests in Norwegian, Maths and English, along with parents' and pupils' surveys. On this basis, the education department of the city of Stavanger has developed a unique system of evaluation and support that is an informal combination of internal and external evaluation. It demonstrates <u>good practice in the way in which external intervention by the local authority seeks to create a culture of quality improvement in local schools</u> by fostering schools as learning organisations: organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire. The goal is that all local schools are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are able to identify steps that can lead to school improvement (see Example 1).

Example 1: External evaluation activity to support schools as learning organisations - the city of Stavanger, Norway

Every two to four years all local schools in Stavanger receive a report from the local authority about their performance. The report is based on results from national tests, parents' and pupils' surveys and self-evaluation, and prepared with the help of the strategic management tool Balanced Scorecard. It is written by one of the advisers from the local authority who has a dual role of assessing the performance of schools and working with the school community to identify measures for quality improvement.

Two months after the school has received the report, a meeting is held between advisers from the local authority and representatives of school management, parents and pupils. This meeting is seen as central to the quality management of the city's education and training system; dialogue is based on the principle of collaboration rather than as a top-down intervention. The goal of the meeting is to write an agreement, based on mutual understanding of the areas that the school needs to improve on, which outlines a plan of action for follow-up measures.

In general terms, in most of the participants' countries a national model of external evaluation is applied while in others a regionalised model is practiced (e.g. Germany and Spain). There is neither national nor regional system of external evaluation in Italy and Norway.

Although the practice and method of external quality assurance can vary very much from country to another, the study visit participants felt that the instruments for external evaluation (e.g. questionnaires, visits and content) look very much alike all across Europe.

2.3 Areas of evaluation and criteria

External school evaluation is usually undertaken in three main domains: processes (at classroom and school levels), student outcomes (academic achievement and social development) and school environment.

In Lithuania, the new system of external evaluation covers five key areas, including: (1) school culture (e.g. ethos, aspirations and school relations); (2) education and training (e.g. organisation, quality of teaching, quality of learning, including teacher/student dialogue); (3) achievements (e.g. academic and other achievements); (4) educational support (e.g. pedagogical and psychological support, career guidance); and (5) strategic management (e.g. self-evaluation, strategy, financial and HR management). In total 15 indicators for effectiveness have been identified, against which schools are measured.

In Hamburg, the reference framework for external evaluation defines 14 dimensions of school effectiveness under three broad categories: (1) leadership and management; (2) teaching, learning, educating; and (3) output and outcomes.

2.4 Consequences of unsatisfactory evaluation results

In some countries external evaluation reports can have very severe consequences, varying from official warnings to retracting the licence to start new courses or closing down schools. Consecutive unsatisfactory evaluation results in countries like the Netherlands and Romania

can lead to the school being closed down. In Hamburg, if a school receive an unsatisfactory result it must accept external support for school improvement and discuss a plan for action with the ministry of education. In the city of Stavanger in Norway the municipality will remove the head master if the school is not willing to work with the municipality on a school improvement plan following several poor results in national tests and/or surveys. Bad performance can affect the bonus of head teachers of VET establishments in Lithuania. Poor evaluation results in Poland can lead to the closure of private schools while public schools need to write a school development plan. In Catalonia, there are no severe consequences for schools from poor performance in external evaluation.

Typically schools are also subject to more regular inspections in case its performance is unsatisfactory.

2.5   Publication of evaluation results

In some countries, evaluation reports are published and available to all stakeholders. This includes Estonia, Flanders (Belgium), the Netherlands, Poland and Romania. In other cases, the reports are presented to the headmaster and/or school community who can decide whether or not to share the information with others. In Saxony, the school evaluation report is intended to be an instrument for the school and they can decide what to do with the results. The same applies to Lithuania although a summary of strengths and weaknesses is made available to everyone. In Catalonia (Spain) only education authorities/officials are provided with the results.

2.6   Evaluators

If schools and teaching are to be evaluated they deserve evaluators who they regard as competent in the areas which they evaluate and in their professional practice as evaluators. A good evaluator has appropriate qualifications and experience and has undergone a careful recruitment and training process.

In Germany, France and Poland external evaluators are recruited and trained to carry out their role on a full time basis. In these cases, inspection/evaluation teams frequently include at least one 'associate inspector' – an inspector who is a practising teacher, head teacher or lecturer from a different school or other educational establishment. In the case of VET, employers can also be involved in evaluation (e.g. in Germany). In Wales even a member of the school's management team participates in the inspection.

In Lithuania all evaluators are practitioners in the field of education. The national agency in charge of evaluation does not employ any full time evaluators. Instead it trains teachers, head teachers, deputy head teachers and educational professionals from different schools and institutions to conduct evaluation alongside their job as an educator.

The recruitment procedures are rigorous. In Lithuania for instance applicants have to undergo several recruitment rounds involving interviews, team assignments, observations and written assignments before around a quarter of applicants are chosen to undertake training. Training lasts 120 hours consisting of practical and classroom based assignments. Importantly, one of key criteria for an evaluator is pleasant disposition as the agency wants evaluators who are trusted by the teaching staff and other school stakeholders as it allows them to build good relationships with schools. In Romania, evaluators have to attend a 90 hour training programme and usually only four out of five trainees pass the exam and become qualified evaluators. In Poland, new external evaluators need to have graduated from a university course on evaluation which is organised by Jagiellonian University in Krakow. They also need to have experience of working as a teacher and undertaken studies on educational management.

In Lithuania, France, Poland and Romania all evaluators need to undergo a re-evaluation / inspection after a specific number of years in the post (typically every 1-3 years).

In Romania the authorities have tried to ensure a transparent process of external evaluation. Inspectors can only operate in regions other than the one in which they live and work. Whilst in some countries this practice is seen as too expensive or logistically too difficult to implement, in Romania this approach has been developed to ensure the transparency and objectivity of the

evaluation process. In this way schools are not evaluated by inspectors who are biased either for professional or personal reasons.

3 FINDINGS ON INTERNAL EVALUATION

The following are some of the key findings on internal evaluation.

3.1 The changing landscape of internal evaluation[6]

Internal evaluation in European countries is also undergoing a process of reform. Just in the last five years self-evaluation has become mandatory in a number of countries and national approaches have been developed. There is indeed an increasing expectation that schools should have effective self-evaluation and improvement processes. In many countries internal evaluation is focused upon the evaluation of processes and activities of a school while in others the full focus is on outcomes.

Internal evaluation has become mandatory in Estonia, France, Germany (Hamburg) and Portugal. In Estonia, a law was introduced four years ago making it obligatory for schools to conduct self-evaluation every three years. All schools and kindergartens had to submit the results of their self-evaluation to authorities for the first time in September 2010. Since 2006, all schools in Hamburg have been legally obliged to make a contract with the local authority (school supervisor) outlining three objectives for school improvement. The evaluation of those objectives is obligatory.

In France, schools are legally obliged to prepare a 'school development plan' the goal of which is to define the activities and procedures for the implementation of national pedagogical objectives and programmes, taking into consideration the local socio-economic environment. At the end of each school year, the school council of each primary school (consisting of the head teacher, teachers and parent representatives) carries out an assessment of the school's operations through the assessment of the 'school development plan'. In the case of secondary schools, the school board is responsible for the evaluation of the project.

There are two types of school self-evaluation in Asturias (Spain): mandatory self-evaluation of the school for teachers and head teachers and voluntary for parents and pupils. Self-evaluation is not compulsory in the Netherlands, although some individual vocational establishments have made it compulsory through their own internal regulations. This applies, for example, to ROC van Twente, which is a regional community college in Twente offering VET and adult education programmes.

A national approach to internal evaluation is in place in Romania where national guidelines for the procedures and instruments have been designed. The Lithuanian agency for school evaluation is also in the process of developing such a system and a national methodology has already been agreed upon.

There is no real tradition of formalised self-evaluation in countries like Bulgaria and Cyprus. For example, only some Cypriot schools will undertake self-evaluation and these are rarely grounded in formal, evidence-based evaluation methods such as surveys designed by experts; instead self-evaluation is very much based upon informal methods.

In Italy, self-evaluation is becoming an important determinant to the process of distributing grants (e.g. in the region of Emilia-Romagna).

3.2 Self-evaluation needs to be embraced by the whole school community

Making internal evaluation compulsory does not directly lead to quality improvement. The process needs to be embraced by the whole school community[7]; internal evaluation is not an

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[6] Please note that in this report the term internal / self-evaluation refers to formalised self-evaluation review of schools' systems, programmes, processes, activities, results and outputs that is systematically performed in regular intervals with agreed criteria and the results are used for continuous school improvement.

exercise that can be carried out by the head teacher or a self-evaluation team in isolation. It can have a positive impact on student outcomes only when all staff understand and embrace the concept, contribute to the process, are aware of the results and take action that is based on the results. The study visit participants were of the opinion that the whole school community needs to have the drive to strive for excellence and the drive needs to come from *within* the school community. Self-evaluation cannot be just 'yet another form to fill in'.

Evidence from the visits suggests that schools are getting better at engaging a range of stakeholders into the process; many schools involve teachers, parents and pupils through methods such as surveys, focus groups, observations and interviews. The involvement of parents is a particularly widespread practice in Asturias (Spain) where parents and teachers get involved in designing questionnaires and even prepare their own school evaluation(s).

However, a systematic involvement of parents and pupils is still far from universal practice and recognised as a weakness in most countries, especially in Belgium (Flanders) and Estonia. The involvement of parents can be strengthened, for example, through their closer involvement in general school activities (e.g. through events, volunteering, parent/school meetings etc.).

The Winterhude Reform School in Hamburg is a good example of a school which has adopted a comprehensive, innovative approach to school improvement (see Example 2). It involves the whole school community, from teachers, pupils and parents to non-pedagogical school staff and external experts, to an on-going process of evaluation and school development. The process is based on close parental involvement in school life, evaluation of all new school activities and close consultation of pupils' and parents' councils. Once a year the head teacher invites international experts ('critical friends') to evaluate the school by asking them for their assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Students are also expected to carry out a self-assessment. The experiences of the school are already having an impact upon the broader educational landscape of the region; a new law is due to be introduced in Hamburg, following the Winterhude experience, that will make it obligatory for all schools to organise bi-annual meetings between parents, pupil and teacher.

Example 2: The Winterhude Reform School *(Gesamtschule Winterhude)*

The Winterhude Reform School is a school in Hamburg with around one thousand pupils aged between five and twenty.

The head teacher of the school has developed an innovative system of 'school improvement', which is based upon on-going self-evaluation. School improvement starts with on-going meetings between pupils' and parents' councils; any new idea or a development plan is first discussed in these forums before anything is progressed. After each meeting, everyone completes a feedback questionnaire about the topic raised in the meeting. Parents' involvement is strengthened by a contract that has to be signed by the parents when their child enters the school. This contract stipulates that the parents agree to come to the school to attend meetings.

Any new activity is evaluated after a year and then less often; for example, recently the school carried out an extensive evaluation of the team activities the school carries out during the first three weeks of each academic cycle to gauge opinion about the way in which money is spent on these activities. The evaluations primarily use questionnaires as the main research methodology although observations and other methods are also used i.e. PhD students from pedagogical departments of universities have visited the school and observed activities for six months before writing an evaluation of the school. The school also pays an educational institute to test the same group of students at grades 3, 6 and 8 in German, English and maths in order to monitor their progress.

The school has also developed an international group of 'critical friends'. Seven international

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[7] School community refers to all individuals involved in school life, including head teachers, deputy teachers, members of the governing board, teachers, counsellors, all non-pedagogical school staff, pupils/students, parents, members of the local community, etc.

education experts from Austria, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK are invited every year to visit the school and help with the self-evaluation. They spend 2.5 days observing lessons and talking to parents, pupils, teachers and other school staff (including house keepers and administrators) and report on their observations on their last day. They give a presentation to teachers and pupils' and parents' councils about what they have seen and provide advice and recommendations on areas which need to be developed.

'Critical friends' are paid by the school through an association which has been set up by the school for school development. Their recent recommendations have included streamlining the school improvement structure; they felt that the school had formed too many (parent/teacher) working groups and as a result, the number of working groups has been reduced and those which remain have been given clear targets.

Also, on regular intervals external experts are invited to the school to give lectures to the school staff and parents. These lectures may be on issues such as school improvement, new pedagogies or any other topic concerning school life. Teachers are given Friday afternoons off to attend thematic workshops, parent/teacher working groups and the school steering committee (which oversees the work of the parent/teacher working groups).

For further information, please see: http://www.gs-winterhude.hamburg.de/

Collaboration with social partners occurs typically in the case of VET institutions; for example, one of the key aspects of quality assurance for the vocational school in Vilnius (*Vilniaus Paslaugu Verslo Darbuotoju Profesinio Rengimo Centras*, PVDRP) is the involvement of social partners. The school has established a working group whose goal is to strengthen links with employer and employee representative as a way of enhancing the labour market responsiveness of its training. School specific quality committees in Romania bring together local community representatives, minority group representatives and members of trade unions representing teachers together with the members of the immediate school community (teachers, parents, head teacher, pupils) to take forward improvement actions identified in the school's self-evaluation.

3.3 Internal evaluation needs to be seen as a process, not as a one-off event

The study visits also demonstrated clearly that internal evaluation needs to be seen as a process, not as a one-off event. The recognition of self-evaluation as a cyclical process is in fact the essential first step in bringing about change and improvement in schools.

Self-evaluation is too often, especially when it is not formalised process, seen as an end to a process of research about school and its performance – rather than as a starting point to a process of school improvement. Too much emphasis can indeed be placed on gathering and presenting information collected through self-evaluation.

Instead, schools need to use information from self-evaluation to plan for improvements, undertake improvement work and organise a regular cyclical process of monitoring and evaluation that leads to further improvement (see the graph). Action plans in which targets are SMART[8] and the roles of different stakeholders clearly defined can support this process.

Overall, schools with solid self-evaluation practices that engage the whole school community in the process are more likely to have well targeted action plans, which have real impact outcomes for their pupils.

This is also the philosophy behind the Irish system of School Development Planning that was presented during the Lithuanian study visit. The system was established in 1999 by the Irish Department of Education and Science to

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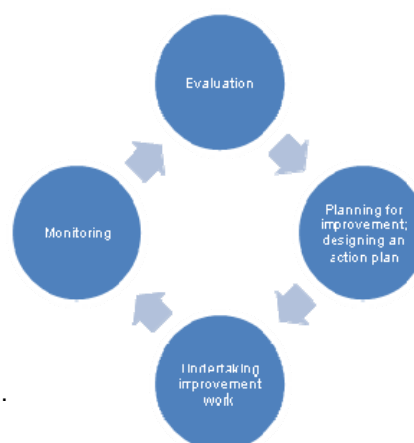
[8] Specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-based.

strengthen a culture of collaborative development planning in schools, with a view to promoting school improvement and effectiveness[9]. The concept promotes self-evaluation as a continuous practice, which is always followed by a plan of action.

3.4   Schools need to be supported in their self-evaluation efforts

Many schools still lack expertise and experience in internal evaluation and they are in different starting points in relation to school evaluation. It must also be remembered that schools are complex organisations and there are many different ways in which they can pursue improvement in the various aspects of their work. The two study visits showed that there are a number of ways in which they can be supported in their efforts to undertake self-evaluation.

In Lithuania for example, some municipalities have employed experts within their education departments whose sole purpose is to help schools to foster a culture of evaluation. One of the municipalities is the Prienai municipality which goes beyond legislative demands to support schools in their efforts to undertake self-evaluation; the evaluation expert of the municipality has established a self-evaluation club for schools (see Example 3 below).

Example 3 - Support provided by the Prienai municipality to local schools to foster self-evaluation

The Prienai municipality runs a club on self-evaluation (known as CSE in Lithuania). It is aimed at those individuals in schools and training institutions who are interested in processes and methodologies related to self-evaluation, including data collection, writing a self-evaluation report and utilising findings from internal evaluation. The club also seeks to increase awareness about the relationship between internal evaluation and school planning. Practical ways of integrating self-evaluation into school improvement plans are discussed, together with motivational techniques for colleagues about the importance of evaluation. Each year the club chooses a specific area of focus; for example, in 2010 the focus of the club was on data collection methods such as questionnaires, focus groups, observations and interviews.

Both formal and non-formal meetings and study visits are organised by the club for school representatives. During such meetings, schools are encouraged to share their experiences, both successful and unsuccessful, with each other. The club is involved wherever possible in national and international projects which address evaluation in order to ensure a constant flow of new ideas and information on new evaluation practices and methods. At the end of each year the activities and results are presented to head teachers in the region.

This club, and other activities which take place within the municipality, have had a profound impact on the culture of evaluation in the region; all local schools offering general education now have a system of self-evaluation in place and schools providing a non-formal education are in the process of developing their own methodologies. The results of internal (and external) evaluation are also used by the municipality to plan education department's activities.

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In a similar manner, the Department of Education in Catalonia (Spain) has recruited a specialist team to support self-evaluation in schools. In Flanders, schools are supported in their efforts to become involved in self-evaluation by the independent pedagogical advisory services, run by school networks (see Example 4).

Example 4: The role of pedagogical advisers in the self-evaluation of schools in Flanders

Pedagogical advisers play a key role in self-evaluation in Flanders. If a school asks for help with quality improvement, an adviser prepares a self-evaluation on behalf of the school.

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[9] For further information, please see: http://www.sdpi.ie/index.html

> (S)he will start the process by gathering data about the school through questionnaires and focus groups. The adviser will use a template for the questionnaire to which each school can add up to 20 of its own questions. The adviser then writes a report for the school which outlines the results of the research and identifies the school's main strengths and weaknesses. This data is then used by the school to choose its own priorities and targets and design activities aimed at school improvement.
>
> In order to receive help, a school needs to take the initiative and seek help; advisers do not 'sell' their services.

Online self-evaluation programmes and tools can help schools with their efforts to find out the views of the school community about the school. In Saxony, there is an internet platform which schools can use to create and modify their own instruments of internal evaluation. Private companies and universities in countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium have developed computerised programmes and questionnaires to help schools with self-evaluation. Schools must purchase these programmes; they are not offered to schools free of charge.

European funding has also been used to develop self-evaluation portals which schools across Europe can download free of charge (see Example 5).

> **Example 5: SEKER, an online self-evaluation tool**
>
> The main outcome of the Leonardo da Vinci project SEKER is an online self-evaluation tool that assists schools and teachers across Europe to develop a culture of self-evaluation. Schools are able to download the evaluation tool free of charge through www.self-evaluation.net. It is based upon the European Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) and is aimed at teachers, although each school can decide the exact focus of their evaluation.

In some countries national education authorities have developed a **national framework for self-evaluation** as a way of guiding schools in their internal school improvement efforts. For example, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science has issued a methodology for internal evaluation in comprehensive schools. The methodology outlines:

- Goals, objectives and principles of internal evaluation

- Organisational arrangements related to internal evaluation, including guidance on different elements of the evaluation process

- Internal evaluation model, including definitions of school performance indicators, areas of school performance evaluation, data collection methods and content of internal evaluation (i.e. strengths and weaknesses, school development priorities, etc.)

The National Agency for School Evaluation is taking the process further by developing an Internet system for self-evaluation in schools. This system will over time consist of modular, validated questionnaires for pupils, parents and teachers. Besides this, the system will also contain other tools like guidelines for focus group and interviews and it will allow reports to be generated automatically.

Self-evaluation manuals are another equally useful way of assisting schools in this process. In some countries (i.e. the UK) such manuals have been designed for schools at different levels while in Lithuania 33 schools have come together to create their own manual on self-evaluation.

Finally, the study visits also showed that the culture of openness and school improvement can be assisted by the practice of **peer observation/ tutoring**, as was witnessed to be the case in Išlaužas Basic School in Lithuania. Teachers reported that it is one way by which teachers and schools can share good practice in learning, teaching and assessment methods. The challenge lies in making teachers who are being observed to understand that peer observation is not about monitoring or judging their methods or behaviour – but the observation is intended to provide a system of peer support, which allows teachers to obtain ideas and learn from each other's practices.

For example, watching how one teacher approaches a particular teaching situation can help another teacher to better understand how to approach similar situations in their own class. It can also prompt observing teachers to reconsider their own particular teaching approaches and perhaps refine their existing approach slightly. It can also be reassuring for staff new to teaching to observe their more established colleagues but this type of pairing can also help to identify and to share good practice from the incoming members of staff.

4 FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION TOWARDS SYSTEMS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT

This section discusses the growing relationship between internal and external evaluation and the way in which school and training institutions are moving towards embracing comprehensive quality management systems.

4.1 The growing recognition of the relationship between internal and external evaluation

The relationship between the internal and external evaluation of schools and training institutions has long been a subject of much discussion. There are for example differences in opinion regarding the **criteria to use for internal and external evaluation**; whilst some approaches base the self-evaluation criteria upon the criteria for external evaluation, other approaches consider that the criteria should be different.

Lithuania is one of the countries where the national methodology for internal evaluation mirrors the evaluation structure used by external evaluators. A core belief of the Lithuanian National Agency for School Evaluation is that school improvement cannot be achieved without internal evaluation.

Many vocational schools in the Netherlands also choose to align their internal evaluation systems to the external one in order to ensure that their internal improvement efforts contribute to the commonly agreed goals at national level. In Romania, the areas of evaluation are also the same for external and internal evaluation. These include: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness and management of quality.

Those who argue against the same criteria for internal and external evaluation do not believe in the common approach as it is argued that the criteria should come from within the school community itself; internal evaluation is seen as a reflective process which enables schools to get to know themselves better and they should identify their own agenda for school improvement.

Both approaches however recognise that there can be a common framework but what schools fundamentally need is the freedom to implement a self-evaluation system to meet their specific needs.

4.2 External evaluation and the results of self-evaluation

The starting point for external evaluation in many countries is the school's self-evaluation, supported by relevant information (including indicators). For example, in Portugal one of the objectives of external evaluation is to check whether a school has a system of self-evaluation. In France, the extent to which individual inspectors take into account internal audits varies. In Lithuania, external evaluators do not review the process of internal evaluation but evaluate the way in which the school has utilised the self-evaluation results. A new pilot project is underway in Catalonia that links external evaluation with the results of internal evaluation. In the Netherlands inspectors use the results of self-evaluation to decide the timing of the follow-up visit.

In some cases the school's self-evaluation report will determine how external evaluators sample evidence to test the school's evaluation of its work. However, the self-evaluation report should not be one that has just been written for the sake of external evaluation or inspection. Instead it should develop from the on-going self-evaluation activities.

4.3 Moving from evaluation towards quality management systems

The study visits showed that evaluation is part of each country's deeply rooted cultural and educational tradition. Consequently, it is not possible to transfer an evaluation system that works well in one context directly into another. Instead, such systems need to be designed to fit the national / regional context. This also means that different evaluation models work in different contexts and it is fundamentally the motivation and commitment of the key stakeholders to quality improvement that can make systems successful.

We are however witnessing a culture change in the way that evaluation is viewed and carried out; attempts are being made to familiarise schools with a broader framework of quality assurance. The quality assurance procedures of vocational schools have tended to be more developed than those of primary and secondary schools (of general education) because of the closer relationship between VET institutions and companies, and due to specific funding provided by some education authorities on the development of quality assurance systems in VET schools. Despite this tradition, we can also see developments taking place in the general education sector. For example, a new law was introduced in Flanders in 2009 on quality care. This law makes it the responsibility of all schools to develop a quality management system. In Romania, by law each school has to have a quality committee in place consisting of all key stakeholders, including teachers, representatives of trade unions for teachers, school management, parents, pupils, representatives of minorities and local community representative. In Hamburg, the ultimate goal is to move towards a system of quality management in schools. The Quality Development Framework for vocational high schools has already been prepared (2008-2013).

The concept of a quality manager is also an interesting one. For example, in the Netherlands, larger VET schools typically employ a team of quality assurance specialists (or at least a quality assurance manager) within their central management/administration team. Such specialists tend to have an extensive knowledge of the application of sophisticated quality mechanisms even in the private sphere; many have indeed been employed from private companies. VET schools in Hamburg receive funding from authorities to purchase sophisticated, computer-based quality assurance systems to assist them with the process. In both cases the schools go beyond the model of evaluation and embed it into the broader quality assurance system of the school.

4.4 Key challenges for future

In order to further develop a culture of school evaluation and move towards systems of quality management, a number of challenges have to be encountered. For instance, in countries where external evaluation is a rather new phenomenon it is necessary to create a **mutual understanding between external evaluators and schools**; it takes time and resources to cultivate enthusiasm and increase both understanding and acceptance by all parties.

One of the greatest challenges for the **creation of a culture of self-evaluation** is that in too many schools it is still regarded as a one-off event and its potential to act as a tool for quality improvement is not always utilised. Overall, schools with solid self-evaluation practices that engage the whole school community in the process are more likely to have well targeted action plans, which have real impact outcomes for their pupils.

Taking quality and school evaluation into account in **teacher training**, both initial and in-service training, is also fundamental to the development of a culture of quality management in schools and training institutions across Europe. This was identified by many participants as one of the major weaknesses in their country.

One of the challenges for schools in many parts of Europe (i.e. Hamburg and Lithuania) is the lack of expertise in making **use of the results of standardised tests** to benefit either school improvement or policy making at local or regional level. For example, in Hamburg schools get feedback about their performance in national tests but there is no clearly defined procedure on what to do with the results and some schools lack experience and expertise in using this data for decision making and school improvement. The same applies to municipalities in Lithuania. For this reason the Lithuanian National Agency for School Improvement has been

running a project with other partners to build up the expertise of municipal personnel in the use of such data. Other schools and authorities use strategy management systems to improve school or authority-wide quality planning processes. For example, the city of Stavanger in Norway uses the Balanced Scorecard to evaluate how effective schools are and how they compare with other local schools. It ranks local schools on the basis of information from the results of national exams, information from parents', pupils' and staff surveys and financial audit.

4.5   Need to promote the benefits of evaluation

Finally, it is necessary to continue promoting the benefits of school evaluation to all members of school communities in order to gain their buy-in. Most of the participants came from countries that are operating very new systems of school evaluation. For this reason limited information was obtained during the visits on the influence of existing evaluation systems. It is nevertheless clear that in all cases the **ultimate goal is to raise standards of achievement in schools**. This refers to academic achievement as well social and personal development.

Even if research evidence was not available, the positive impact of evaluation activity could be demonstrated through individual examples. As an example, in the case of ROC Friesland College (vocational institute in the Netherlands), quality improvement efforts within the institute, which have followed external and internal evaluation results, have led to a **reduction in the number of early school leavers** and **improved academic outcomes for students**. At the G9 vocational school in Hamburg, school evaluation and associated quality improvement efforts have led to students feeling like they are taken more seriously than before, by being able to play an active part in school development. This again has led to improved study results, heightened motivation and better self-confidence. At Išlaužas Basic School in Lithuania activities implemented as a result of internal audits have changed the school life for pupils in many ways. Children are more open about the challenges and problems they face in their school life and children's behaviour has improved.

Besides positives outcomes for pupils, teachers at G9 have a greater awareness of the role of quality assurance in education and are more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their school. They have also become more confident and willing to put forward new ideas for school improvement. They also review their own practices in a more critical light than before. These positive results have also increased the **motivation of the whole school community** to take part in evaluation.

Staff at Vilnius Vytautas Magnus Gymnasium in Lithuania reported of having similar positive implications on the work of teachers. At Išlaužas Basic School self-evaluation has also had practical outcomes such as a day care centre having been opened following feedback from parents and other members of the local community, and teachers being given a more welcoming space to relax between lessons.

School evaluation processes can also help to facilitate the development of positive working relationships between education authorities and their schools. In the case of Stavanger (see Example 1 in the beginning of the report), the practice of the local authority in combining external and internal evaluation has had many results on all parties involved. Independent evaluation concluded that parents think that the dialogue with schools has improved, schools' improvement plans have become more focussed and thereby more achievable and real, and schools have a high regard for the work done by the local authority on school improvement.

It was also learned that **teachers' professional development** can benefit from a school's commitment to evaluation, particularly in a school where staff are encouraged to share expertise with colleagues and to take up training opportunities. For some head teachers, particularly those recently appointed, school evaluation has provided a means to learn about their school and to organise change.