OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

NORTHERN IRELAND, UNITED KINGDOM

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

This report for Northern Ireland forms part of the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes (see Annex A). The purpose of the Review is to explore how systems of evaluation and assessment can be used to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education. The Review looks at pupil assessment, teacher appraisal, school leader appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation, and how these help to improve pupils' learning.

Northern Ireland's involvement in the OECD Review was co-ordinated by Karen McCullough at the Standards and Improvement Team, Department of Education. Northern Ireland opted to participate in the country review strand of the international project and host a visit by an external review team. Members of the OECD review team were Claire Shewbridge (OECD Secretariat), co-ordinator of the review; Marian Hulshof (programme manager of Research and Development within the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, Netherlands); Deborah Nusche (OECD Secretariat); and Lars Stenius Staehr (Project Manager at Novo Nordisk and testing consultant for the Danish Ministry of Education, Denmark) (see Annex C). This publication is the report from the OECD review team. It provides, from an international perspective, an independent analysis of major issues facing the evaluation and assessment framework in Northern Ireland, current policy initiatives, and possible future approaches. The report serves three purposes: (1) provide insights and advice to the Northern Ireland authorities; (2) help other OECD countries understand Northern Ireland's approach; and (3) improve the international knowledge on evaluation and assessment policies. Although the final comparative report of the project was published in April 2013, evidence collected and analysis conducted during the review visit to Northern Ireland fed into the international report.

An important part of Northern Ireland's involvement was the preparation of a Country Background Report (CBR) on evaluation and assessment policy developed by Carl Savage and Dale Heaney at the Department of Education. The OECD review team is grateful to the authors and to all those who assisted them for compiling a high quality and informative report as background to the review and analysis. The CBR is an important output from the OECD project in its own right as well as an important source for the OECD review team. Unless indicated otherwise, the data for this report are taken from the Northern Ireland CBR. The CBR follows guidelines prepared by the OECD Secretariat and provides extensive information, analysis and discussion in regard to the national context, the organisation of the school system, the main features of the evaluation and assessment framework and the views of key stakeholders. In this sense, the CBR and this report complement each other and, for a more comprehensive view of evaluation and assessment in Northern Ireland, should be read in conjunction.

The review visit to Northern Ireland took place between 26 February and 5 March 2013. The itinerary is provided in Annex B. The visit was designed by the OECD in collaboration with the Department of Education. During the review visit, the team held discussions with a wide range of officials within the Department of Education, including

the Education and Training Inspectorate; the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; school support providers; teacher educators; teacher and school principal representatives; civil society organisations; and researchers with an interest in evaluation and assessment issues. The team also visited a range of schools, interacting with representatives of the Board of Governors, school leadership, teachers, students and parents in Belfast and its surrounds and also in Derry. The intention was to provide a broad cross-section of information and opinions on evaluation and assessment policies and how their effectiveness can be improved.

The OECD review team wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all those who took time to meet with us and to share their insights. Our overwhelming memory is of a warm welcome wherever we went and frank, open, constructive and stimulating discussions. We wish to thank the Department of Education for meeting our challenging demands to organise a review visit that allowed us to learn different perspectives from many different stakeholders (see Annex B). In particular, we warmly thank Karen McCullough, Katrina Godfrey, Suzanne Kingon and Paul McAllister for accompanying us at different stages of the review, making sure that everything ran like clockwork and allowing us to concentrate on learning from the people we met. The courtesy and hospitality extended to us throughout our stay in Northern Ireland made our task as a review team as pleasant and enjoyable as it was stimulating and challenging.

In particular, during the OECD review, we asked all stakeholders to provide us with information and evidence on assessment and evaluation practices in Northern Ireland. We wish to extend particular thanks to all those who chose to do so and to send research and information on practices to us during and after the review visit. This vast information base formed a rich resource and helped the OECD review team to develop a deeper understanding of evaluation and assessment in Northern Ireland. While our report may not refer explicitly to some of this material, it was invaluable in underpinning our initial analysis. Any misunderstandings or misinterpretations are entirely our responsibility.

The OECD review team is also grateful to Liz Zachary for editorial and publication support on this report and to Heike-Daniela Herzog for administrative support.

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

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

Of course, this report is the responsibility of the OECD review team.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AA	Associate Assessor
AQE	Association for Quality Education
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BoG	Board of Governors
C2k	Classroom 2000 Project
CASS	Curriculum Advisory Support Service
CBA	Computer Based Assessment
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CITO	Central Institute for Test Development
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DI	District Inspector
ELBs	Education and Library Boards
EPD	Early Professional Development
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
ESaGS	Every School a Good School
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EU	European Union
FIP	Formal Intervention Process
FSME	Free School Meal Entitlement
FUI	Follow-up inspection
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
KS	Key Stage
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

InCAS	Interactive Computerised Assessment System
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education Systems
LoP	Levels of Progression
NSN	National Student Number
NILA	Northern Ireland Literacy Assessment
NINA	Northern Ireland Numeracy Assessment
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment
PPTC	Post Primary Test Consortium
PRSD	Performance Review and Staff Development
RI	Reporting Inspector
RTU	Regional Training Unit
SAER	Summary of Annual Examination Results
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIMS	School Information Management System
SLS	School Leavers Survey
TALIS	OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey
TIMMS	Trends in International Maths and Science Study
TNC	Teachers' Negotiating Committee
TTI	Together Towards Improvement

Executive summary

Compared internationally, pupils in Northern Ireland perform very well in assessments at the primary level, and around average at the post-primary level. However, compared to the OECD average, differences in pupil performance at age 15 are more strongly associated with their schools' socio-economic intake. Social deprivation varies significantly among local government districts, as shown by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Children follow 12 years of compulsory schooling from age 4 to 16, transferring to post-primary school at age 11. Some 43% of pupils are enrolled in academically selective post-primary schools and these, on average, have a more advantaged socio-economic intake. In some non-selective post-primary schools, there are high concentrations of pupils entitled to free school meals.

The vast majority of pupils are in public schools (grant-aided) and follow a common curriculum set out in four Key Stages (1 to 2 in primary and 3 to 4 in post-primary). At Key Stage 4, there is a common system of summative assessments that leads towards qualifications recognised throughout the United Kingdom. New assessment policies have been introduced to align with the Northern Ireland knowledge and skills based curriculum and to promote greater coherence between assessment practices in primary and post-primary schools. Since 2012/13, teachers are responsible for the summative assessment of pupils' cross-curricular skills at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. A central moderation system that engages working teachers has been introduced to ensure the reliability of these assessments.

There are also important policies to introduce more coherence in governance and school support services. Traditionally, public schools fall into distinct categories according to which body awards their funding and the type of school management. There is a proposal to establish an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) that would be responsible for all public schools and for providing school support services. Current policy aims to strengthen the role of the school's Board of Governors (BoG) in leading and managing the school.

In many ways, evaluation and assessment policies in Northern Ireland follow the principles identified by the OECD to develop a coherent framework for evaluation and assessment:

- There is a clear expectation that evaluation and assessment lead to improved pupil learning and outcomes. There are system-wide targets to improve both the quality and equality of pupil outcomes, and key policies communicate the expectation that learning targets are applied and followed at the individual pupil level. Diagnostic assessments are provided to primary schools to aid the assessment of pupils against key areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum, and school self-evaluation is firmly anchored in the school development planning process. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) highlights key areas for improvement identified in school inspections and the Department of Education has a mechanism to follow up schools identified as being in need of improvement.

- There is a strong focus in official policy on teacher professionalism, which is expected to strengthen the link to classroom activities. A new moderation procedure for pupil assessment in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 gives a central role to teachers. There is also an approach to engage educators in pilots and the development of key policies.

- There is a clear intention to create synergies among pupil assessment, school evaluation, teacher and school leader appraisal and school system evaluation, and to bring these together into a more coherent framework. For example, teacher appraisal and professional development is linked to school development goals.

- There are systems to promote the use of evidence in evaluation and assessment activities. Schools benefit from sophisticated tools to support their self-evaluation activities. Central benchmarking information feeds into school inspection and school self-evaluation and, more recently, is sent directly to the BoG. School inspection collects first-hand evidence, notably with a strong component of classroom observation and provides a broader set of qualitative evidence on the school system.

However, there remain challenges to the effective implementation of assessment policies. An official review of the central computer-based assessments in primary schools has documented many implementation problems. The lack of continuity in central tests seems to have presented considerable challenges to schools. There are also tensions around the implementation of teacher assessment against the Levels of Progression. There may be a duplication of evaluation activities in schools with highly developed self-evaluation capacity, and policies to better align school inspection to school self-evaluation are expected to address this. The OECD review team has identified ways to further consolidate the evaluation and assessment framework.

Prioritise efforts to effectively implement the evaluation and assessment framework

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The OECD underlines the importance of communicating the long-term vision of what evaluation and assessment policies aim to achieve. An analysis of evidence on Northern Ireland's school system suggests two significant aims would be to improve the quality and equality of pupil learning outcomes and to promote social cohesion. There is a sound approach to engaging educators in the piloting and review of different assessment policies. Such reviews are critical in building credibility for the new approach and provide a mechanism for listening to schools, recognising any limitations, and addressing issues as a matter of priority. There is a need to validate the diagnostic tests and to ensure these meet educators' needs, for example, by incorporating as much as possible the functionalities that schools appreciate in the most frequently used commercial tests.

Continue to build capacity for evaluation and assessment

Teacher professionalism is a key pillar of the evaluation and assessment framework and there is a need to ensure that teacher appraisal is followed up with adequate professional learning opportunities. It is important to plan for innovative ways to organise local delivery of learning opportunities. "Professional learning" can happen where practitioners visit other schools, exchange practical advice and conduct action research.

The proposed ESA presents a significant opportunity to harmonise and strengthen the support offered to schools by drawing on the extensive experience in the existing support bodies and identifying their most effective practices. It is critical that educators are seriously engaged in helping to design these services. Given the importance of school self-evaluation it is essential to ensure adequate self-evaluation capacity among school leadership. The best aspects of existing training for school leadership, including the ETI's associate assessor scheme with its focus on classroom observation, should feed into the new support services. Identifying BoGs that have effective evaluation models can help to design further materials and specific training to develop capacity for school leader appraisal. At the central level, there is room to strengthen the ETI's capacity to undertake risk assessment with a stronger data analysis function. In the longer term, it may be prudent to secure central capacity to develop diagnostic assessments for schools and to ensure their continuity and heightened functionality.

Further develop reference standards for evaluation and assessment

To ensure coherence between initial teacher education, registration, appraisal and professional development, it is essential to promote the wider use of the teacher competence standards as a working document in schools. A review of the use of teaching standards and criteria by schools can be used to revise the teaching standards and to develop clearer descriptions of the competencies necessary for different roles and career steps for teachers. Similarly, the use of professional standards for school leadership can promote excellence, provide common reference criteria and contribute to a fair, valid and reliable appraisal process. Educators can help to further develop the Levels of Progression to make sure these are useful for formative assessment.

Align reporting systems to priority goals and promote a greater sharing of information on pupil progress through the school system

Given the priority of equity in the government's programme of work, a more prominent and focused reporting on this is recommended. It will also be important to ensure a consistent approach to reporting on equity in school evaluation and system evaluation. Research into the relative advantages of different measures for equity would ensure credibility for the choice of the major measure of pupil entitlement to free school meals. The introduction of a moderation process holds great potential to more effectively monitor the progress of student learning across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. At the stage of transition from primary to post-primary schooling, there may be quick and efficient ways to capitalise on the potential of C2k school-based information systems to share key assessment information. There is room to develop a more systematic longitudinal research strategy and to draw on the Education and Training Inspectorate's insight to cross-departmental challenges and priorities.

Chapter 1

Schooling in Northern Ireland

In 1999, policy and legislative responsibility for education was devolved from the United Kingdom government to a local Assembly in Northern Ireland. Nearly all pupils attend a public school, although the funding and management of these varies. Compared internationally, pupils perform well at the primary level and around average at the post-primary level, but there is a stronger link between schools' socio-economic intake and pupil outcomes. Major policy developments include: new assessment arrangements to better fit the Northern Ireland curriculum; a mechanism to follow up the results of external school evaluation; a proposal to create a single authority to manage and support all public schools; and new rights for pupils to have access to a wide choice of general and applied subjects at post-primary level.

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

Context

Population and governance

In 2011, the population of Northern Ireland was 1.8 million, compared to 3.1 million in Wales, 5.3 million in Scotland and 53 million in England (the total population in the United Kingdom being 63.2 million).[1]

In 1999, policy and legislative responsibility for education was devolved from the United Kingdom government to a local Assembly in Northern Ireland. A locally elected Minister of Education is responsible for: setting policy direction and allocating resources, setting targets for the education system, and accounting to the Assembly for outcomes.

Economy

Compared internationally, the United Kingdom has a high level of regional economic inequality, and urban deprivation is an identified challenge (OECD, 2011a). Between 1995 and 2007, Northern Ireland contributed less than 5% to the national GDP growth in the United Kingdom; only in Wales and the North East was this contribution equally modest. All other regions, with the exception of London and the South East of England, contributed a maximum of 10 per cent to GDP growth. Since 1975, income inequality among working-age persons has risen faster in the United Kingdom than in any other OECD country and is well above the OECD average (OECD, 2011b).

These economic disparities are reflected in the deprivation measure used in official education statistics: free school meal entitlement. The proportion of post-primary pupils entitled to free school meals is 30.0% in Belfast, 29.8% in Derry and 27.2% in Strabane, but is less than 14% in nine other local government districts, including North Down (10.1%), Castlereagh (9.6%), Newtownabbey (13.1%) and Antrim (12.1%) that surround the Belfast district.[2] Figures for primary pupils illustrate the same disparities: Belfast (46.8%), Derry (43.6%) and Strabane (38.9%) and eight districts with less than 23%.

The most recent national labour force survey estimates for July to September 2013 put the overall rate of unemployment for the 16 to 64 year old population in Northern Ireland at 7.3%; which is below the United Kingdom average (7.6%) and nearly half the unemployment rate in Ireland (13.6%).[3] The most recent international data show that the unemployment rate in the United Kingdom is slightly below the OECD average and lower than for other European Union members within the OECD.[4] However, the most recent national statistics show that Northern Ireland has the lowest employment rate among the twelve regions of the United Kingdom (67.2% employment rate for 16 to 64 year olds in Northern Ireland, compared to 71.8% in the United Kingdom on average).[5] Among 16 to 64 year olds, the rate of economic inactivity is 27.4%, comprising students (27%), sick or disabled individuals (26%), individuals looking after the family or home (26%), retired individuals (12%) and others (9%).

Political environment

Northern Ireland has had a difficult political history. Between 1969 and 1994 Northern Ireland endured a period of conflict known as "the Troubles". 1998 saw the

signature and approval by referendum of the Belfast agreement, known as "the Good Friday agreement", which states that Northern Ireland will remain within the United Kingdom for as long as that is the wish of the people living there. The Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998 established the Northern Ireland Assembly. This was suspended at different times over the following years, with devolved powers fully restored in 2007.

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to creating a united, reconciled and shared society. The *Together: Building a United Community Strategy* outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation.[6] It lays the foundations for a transformed and more shared society in the future and Departments are expected to work together to ensure outcomes are delivered on the ground. For education, the Programme for Government contains specific commitments to shared education.[7]

Main features of the school system in Northern Ireland

Compulsory education

There are 12 years of compulsory education in Northern Ireland, typically for children aged 4 to 16 years. During compulsory schooling, children will transfer to a different school at age 11. Children aged 4 to 11 attend primary schools; and children aged 11 to 16 attend post-primary schools;[8] plus an additional two years of non-compulsory education is offered at post-primary schools from ages 16 to 18. Schooling is organised into Key Stages (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Stages of schooling in Northern Ireland

School type	Stage of Schooling	School Year level	Age	Summative assessment at end of Key Stage
Primary school	Foundation Stage	Years 1 and 2	Ages 4-6	
	Key Stage 1	Years 3 and 4	Ages 6-8	Teacher assessment of pupil against Level of Progression
	Key Stage 2	Years 5, 6 and 7	Ages 8-11	Teacher assessment of pupil against Level of Progression
Post-primary school	Key Stage 3	Years 8, 9 and 10	Ages 11-14	Teacher assessment of pupil against Level of Progression
	Key Stage 4	Years 11 and 12	Ages 14-16	General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)
	Post-16 provision / Key Stage 5*	Years 13 and 14	Ages 16-18	GCE Advanced ("A" Level)

Note: * This is non-compulsory schooling.

Different types of schools and management

The vast majority of schools in Northern Ireland are publicly funded (grant-aided schools). In 2012/13 there were only 15 independent schools in which around 0.2% of all pupils in Northern Ireland were enrolled.

Historically, there have been distinct school categories for grant-aided schools (or publicly funded schools) according to which body awards their funding and the type of school management. Table 1.2 presents an overview of the number of schools by management type. The major bodies responsible for funding and management historically include:

- The Education and Library Boards (ELBs), i.e. the local authorities: These are both the funding and employing authority for controlled schools, and the funding authority for maintained schools.

- The Department of Education: This is the funding authority for voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools.

- The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS): This is the employing authority for teaching staff in Catholic maintained schools.

- The Board of Governors (BoG): This is the employing authority for teaching staff in the remaining maintained schools and for all school staff in voluntary grammar schools and in grant-maintained integrated schools. In practice, in all schools the Board of Governors has responsibility for the overall leadership and management of its school, including school staff.

Table 1.2 Different types of publicly funded schools in Northern Ireland (2012/13)

Publicly funded schools	Primary schools		Post-primary schools	
Type of management	*Number of schools*	*Proportion*	*Number of schools*	*Proportion*
Controlled	393	47.2	77	35.8
Maintained	416	50.0	72	33.5
Voluntary	-	-	51	23.7
Grant-maintained integrated	23	2.8	15	7.0
Total:	832		215	

Note: This table excludes preparatory departments of selective post-primary schools (grammar schools).

Source: DENI (Department of Education Northern Ireland) (2013a), *Schools and pupils in Northern Ireland*, www.deni.gov.uk/enrolment_time_series_updated_1213.xlsx, Excel file, accessed 28 November 2013.

The Education Bill introduced into the Assembly in October 2012 would establish a new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and make it the employing authority for all teachers in grant-maintained schools and the funding authority for all schools.

Regardless of the funding authority or type of management, there are two major types of post-primary school: academically selective schools (the vast majority of which are "grammar schools"); and non-selective schools (referred to in national statistics as "non-grammar schools") (see Table 1.3).

Main trends and concerns

The public school system largely reflects traditional divides in society

Although there is nearly universal enrolment in public schools, this system reflects traditional divides in society. The majority of children and young people continue to be educated within a single identity setting: 80.2% of pupils attending controlled schools are of Protestant denomination and 97.8% of pupils attending Catholic Maintained schools are of Catholic denomination (2012/2013 Annual School Census). The Young Life and Times Survey (2011) reported that 31% of young people said that they rarely or never socialise with people from a different religious community, while 22% said they had no close friend from the other main religious community.

However, to put these figures into perspective, the first integrated school was opened in 1981 and was the initiative of a small group of parents to bring together 28 pupils from the two main religious communities. Since then the integrated sector has increased in size and currently (2012/13) enrolls 6.9% of all pupils in grant-aided primary and post-primary schools. A recent review of integrated education policy finds this to be a considerable achievement in the midst of conflict and within a divided society (Hansson, O'Connor Bones and McCord, 2013). It also points to a new focus in all political parties on an increased sharing of resources among and between schools in Northern Ireland and suggests that this has been bolstered by the current economic climate. The review summarises research on attitudes towards integrated education and finds strong public support in different surveys for integrated education, school partnerships to collaborate and share facilities and mixed schooling.

Demographic drops have induced a series of school rationalisation

There has been a long period of significant decline in the school age population (Figure 1.1). However, national estimates show an increase in the number of children aged 4 and under between 2006 and 2011 (Figure 1.1), which indicates the continuation of the recent trend in slightly higher numbers of children enrolled in primary schools (Figure 1.2). In fact, over the next 9 years, the population aged 16 years and under is projected to increase by 5% (NISRA, 2013).

The decline in primary enrolments between 1996/97 and 2009/10 has impacted enrolments in post-primary schools, mainly in the non-selective sector: the enrolment numbers have remained relatively constant for grammar schools and the demographic decrease has been absorbed by the other post-primary schools mainly from 2003/04 onwards. This means that the proportion of young people enrolled in grammar schools has increased from 40.6% in 1996/67 to 43.0% in 2012/13.

Figure 1.1 Demographic trends for school age population
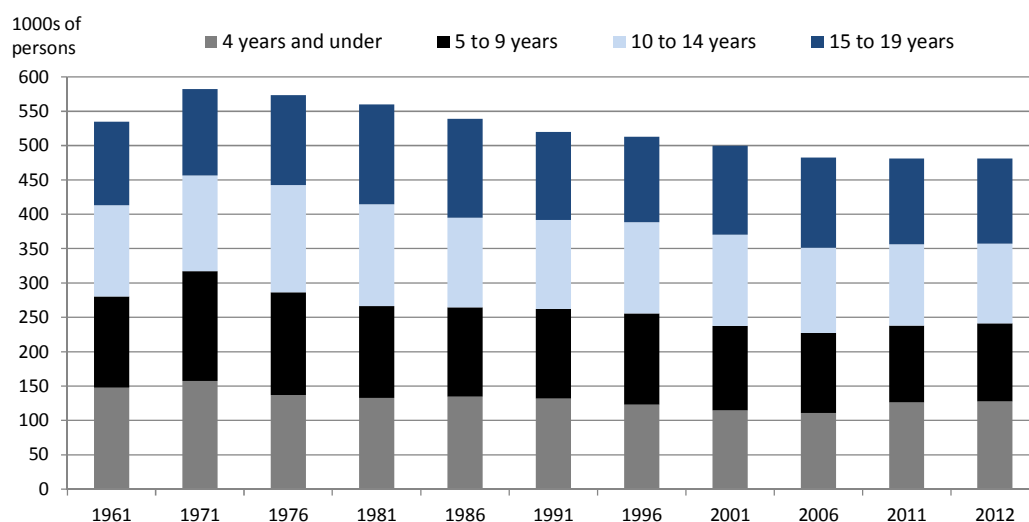
Source: NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) (2013), "Statistics Press Notice – 2012-Based Population Projections",
www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/projections/Northern%20Ireland%20Population%20Projections%202012%20-%20Statistics%20Press%20Notice.pdf

The reduced enrolment in non-selective post-primary schools is mirrored by a reduction in the total number of non-selective schools (Table 1.3). Between 1991/92 and 2012/13 there has been a rationalisation from 166 to 147 non-selective post-primary schools, whereas the number of selective schools, predominantly grammar schools, has remained very stable.

Figure 1.2 Trends in enrolment at primary and post-primary levels
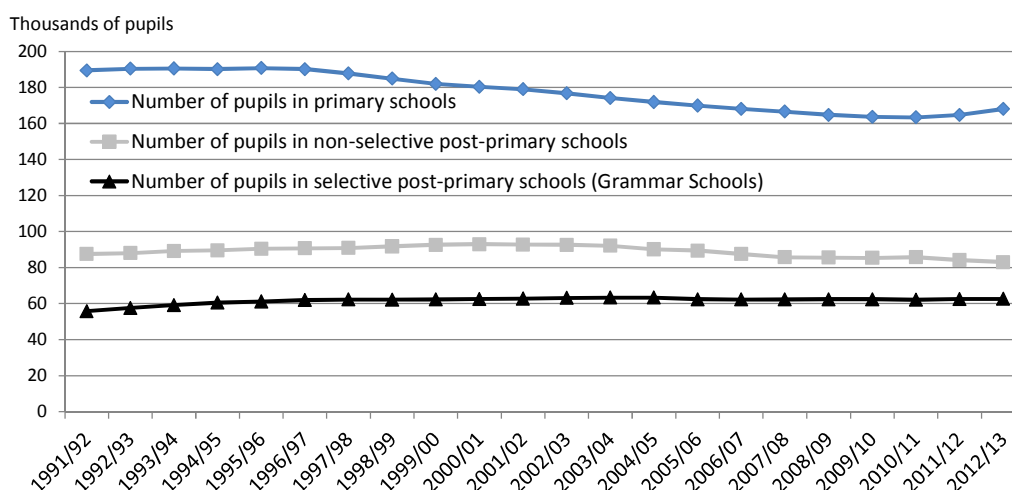
Note: The primary level includes children in nursery classes and reception.

Source: DENI (Department of Education Northern Ireland) (2013a), Schools and pupils in Northern Ireland, www.deni.gov.uk/enrolment_time_series_updated_1213.xlsx, Excel file, accessed 28 November 2013.

Table 1.3 Trends in the number of post-primary schools

		1991/92	2001/02	2012/13
Non-selective post-primary schools				
Controlled		82	70	55
Catholic Maintained		82	76	71
Other Maintained		-	1	1
Controlled Integrated		-	4	5
Grant Maintained Integrated		2	13	15
Total non-selective post-primary schools:		166	164	147
Selective post-primary schools (grammar schools)				
Controlled		18	17	17
Voluntary	Catholic management	30	32	29
	Other management	22	22	22
Total selective schools (grammar schools):		70	71	68
Total post-primary schools		**236**	**235**	**215**

Source: DENI (Department of Education Northern Ireland) (2013a), Schools and pupils in Northern Ireland, www.deni.gov.uk/enrolment_time_series_updated_1213.xlsx, Excel file, accessed 28 November 2013.

Generally high quality primary schooling and evidence of improvement in schools with identified challenges

Evidence on pupil performance in primary schools and on primary school provision indicates that the large majority of pupils are performing well and benefit from high quality education. However, there are persistent challenges in improving outcomes for around a fifth of pupils, particularly in schools serving less socially and economically advantaged communities. Although evidence from external school evaluations suggests that some progress is being made here.

Excellent skills in reading and mathematics at the primary level in international comparison

At the primary level, Northern Ireland has internationally comparable information for the first time on pupil performance. Results indicate excellent performance for Year 6 pupils in Northern Ireland in reading and mathematics, and strong performance in science (Mullis et al., 2012a; Mullis et al., 2012b; Martin et al., 2012). Such results appear to mirror the policy focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills. In 2011, Year 6 pupils in a random sample of schools sat the IEA's (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Pupils in Northern Ireland performed well above the international average and were only significantly outperformed by pupils in Hong Kong (China), the Russian Federation, Finland and Singapore (Exhibit 1.3, Mullis et al., 2012a).

19% of participating pupils in Northern Ireland performed the most difficult tasks in PIRLS and achieved the "advanced international benchmark" (compared to 8% on average internationally, Exhibit 2.1, Mullis et al., 2012a). This means that pupils demonstrated they could:

- *"When reading Literary Texts*: Integrate ideas and evidence across a text to appreciate overall themes; Interpret story events and character actions to provide reasons, motivations, feelings, and character traits with full text-based support;

- *When reading Informational Texts*: Distinguish and interpret complex information from different parts of text, and provide full text-based support; Integrate information across a text to provide explanations, interpret significance, and sequence activities; and Evaluate visual and textual features to explain their function."

Similarly, Year 6 pupils in Northern Ireland performed significantly above the international average in the IEA's Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In mathematics, pupils in Northern Ireland were only outperformed by those in Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong-China, Chinese Taipei and Japan, but performed significantly better than pupils in all other countries (Exhibit 1.3, Mullis et al., 2012b). Boys and girls in Northern Ireland performed similarly in the mathematics assessment (Exhibit 1.10, Mullis et al., 2012b). Twenty four per cent of participating Year 6 pupils performed the most difficult tasks in the mathematics assessment and achieved the "advanced benchmark" (compared to 4% on average internationally, Exhibit 2.2, Mullis et al., 2012b). This means pupils demonstrated they could:

- "Apply their understanding and knowledge in a variety of relatively complex situations and explain their reasoning. They can solve a variety of multi-step word problems involving whole numbers, including proportions. Students at this level show an increasing understanding of fractions and decimals. Students can apply

geometric knowledge of a range of two- and three-dimensional shapes in a variety of situations. They can draw a conclusion from data in a table and justify their conclusion."

Fifty nine per cent of participating Year 6 pupils in Northern Ireland performed at the "High Benchmark" in the mathematics assessment compared to 28% on average internationally (Mullis et al., 2012b).

In the TIMSS 2011 science assessment, participating Year 6 pupils performed significantly above the international average, although they performed significantly lower than pupils in 17 other countries (Exhibit 1.3, Martin et al., 2012). There was no significant performance difference between boys and girls, (Exhibit 1.10, Martin et al., 2012). In contrast to their performance on the reading and mathematics assessments, an average proportion of pupils in Northern Ireland performed at "the advanced benchmark" in the science assessment (Exhibit 2.2, Martin et al., 2012).

Signs of improvement in schools with less advantaged pupil intake and schools with identified challenges

Evidence from external school evaluations indicates that there is in general good quality provision in primary schools. Over the two year period 2010-2012, the overall effectiveness of 78% of the primary schools inspected was evaluated as good or better (ETI, 2012, p.44). Of children leaving primary school, 82% had achieved the expected level in English and 83% in mathematics. In 82% of the lessons observed by school inspectors, the quality of learning and teaching was evaluated as good or better, and in 50% it was evaluated as very good or outstanding. In 78% of the schools inspected the quality of leadership and management was evaluated as good or better.

The areas of concern are to ensure improved leadership in the remaining 22% of schools and to improve literacy and numeracy standards for those children not yet attaining the expected levels at the end of primary school. Although inspections are not designed to test a representative sample of all schools in Northern Ireland, evidence from 2010-2012 suggests that there may be improvements for schools serving less socially and economically advantaged communities, as measured by children's entitlement to free school meals: The performance gap between schools serving more advantaged communities and schools serving less advantaged communities was significantly lower among the schools inspected in 2010/12, compared to schools inspected in 2008/10.

Primary schools where educational provision had been evaluated as inadequate or unsatisfactory and which had entered into the Formal Intervention Process (FIP) (see below), have responded well and demonstrated improvements. Of the 21 primary schools entered into the FIP during the period from 2009-2012, 13 have exited the programme successfully and one has closed (ETI, 2012).

Data from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey indicate a high level of satisfaction among parents with the emphasis on numeracy and literacy skills in their child's primary school.[9]

Pronounced equity concerns in post-primary schooling and need for improvement in many schools

Evidence on student performance in post-primary schools indicates improvements on average in terms of the proportion of students attaining national qualifications. However, in PISA 2009 both the average performance and proportion of top performing students

were at the OECD average – despite the long established and prevalent emphasis on academic selection within the post-primary sector. There are clear structural challenges to equity at the post-primary level, with a high concentration of less socially and economically advantaged students in the non-selective post-primary schools. Evidence from external school evaluations indicates that more improvement is needed at the post-primary level and that improvements have not kept pace with those in the primary sector.

Average skills in reading and mathematics in international comparison; signs of improvement on national measures

Internationally comparative performance information from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that 15 year old students in Northern Ireland perform around the OECD average and indicates a strong relationship between student socio-economic background and performance. As is the case in the United Kingdom as a whole, while reading and mathematics performance is around average, students perform comparatively better in science (OECD, 2010a).[10] Within the different areas of reading assessed in the PISA 2009 survey, students in Northern Ireland performed relatively better on tasks that required students to engage with a text while drawing on information, ideas or values external to the text (known as reflect and evaluate tasks) (OECD, 2010a).

There is a wide range of performance in reading among students in Northern Ireland. The performance difference among the middle 50% of students (between the 25th and 75th percentiles) is above the OECD average, as is the performance difference between the top and bottom 10% of students (Figure 1.3). In each case, the score of the lower performing students is around the OECD average and that of the top performing students is slightly higher than on average in the OECD – especially the score of the top 10% of students. In better performing systems, there is less variation in student performance (Figure 1.3)[11].

Figure 1.3 Reading performance distribution at age 15 in international comparison
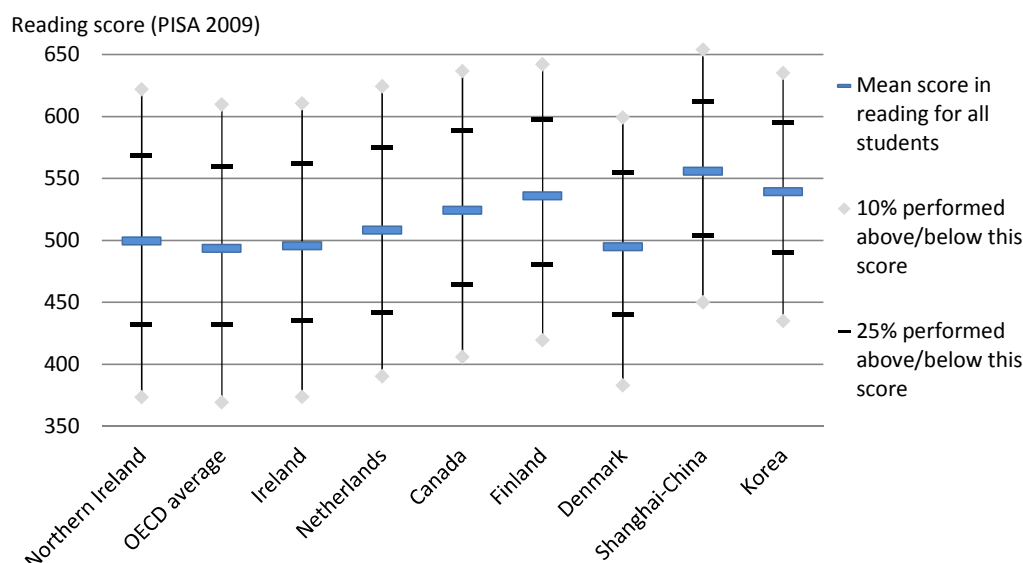
Note: The systems are presented from left to right in order of decreasing performance difference between the top and bottom 10% of students.

Source: OECD (2010a), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091450-en (Tables 1.2.3 and S.1c)

However, the PISA results also indicate that there is room for improvement at the top. Sixteen per cent of the students in Northern Ireland were able to perform the most demanding tasks in one or more areas assessed in PISA 2009; this is the same percentage as on average in the OECD (Figure 1.4). A focus on these "top performers" reveals that just over half were among the top performers in the reading (9.3%) or mathematics (10.3%) assessment; this compares to 11.8% among the top performers in the science assessment. This indicates that even among the top performing students there is room to further improve competencies in reading and mathematics, in addition to a general concern to increase the number of top performing students.

Figure 1.4 Percentage of top performing students in PISA 2009
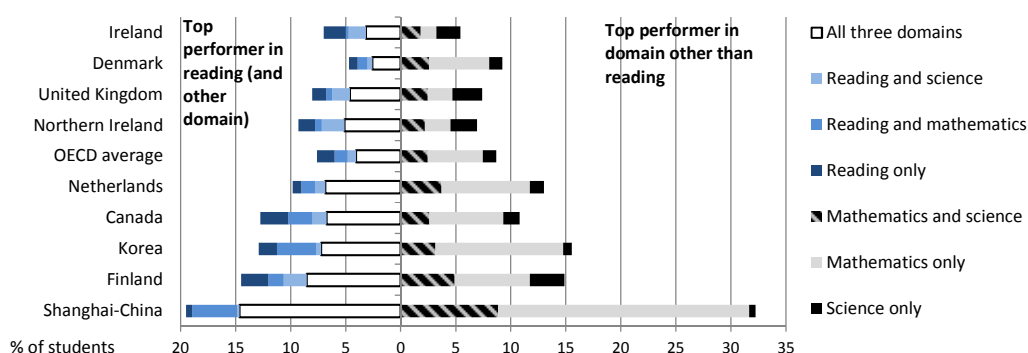
Source: OECD (2010a), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091450-en

National benchmarks show improved performance for students at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2006/07, 64.7% of school leavers achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent, but this rose to 76.5% in 2011/12. The benchmark that includes GCSEs in English and mathematics shows an increase from 54.2% in 2006/07 to 62.0% in 2011/12.

In international comparison, student success is strongly associated with socio-economic factors

International evidence highlights a key equity challenge in Northern Ireland's post-primary school system. There is a variation in how students perform on the reading assessment within each OECD school system (Figure 1.3) and on average in the OECD, 42% of this variation lies between schools and 65% within schools (OECD 2010b). The equivalent figures for Northern Ireland are 54% between schools and 57% within schools. However, in Northern Ireland nearly 40% of the variation in reading performance is explained by a combination of student and, more importantly, school socio-economic status (Figure 1.5).[12] This relationship is more pronounced than on average in the OECD and in comparison to other systems with a better average performance in reading.

Figure 1.5 Relationship between student and school socio-economic status and reading performance
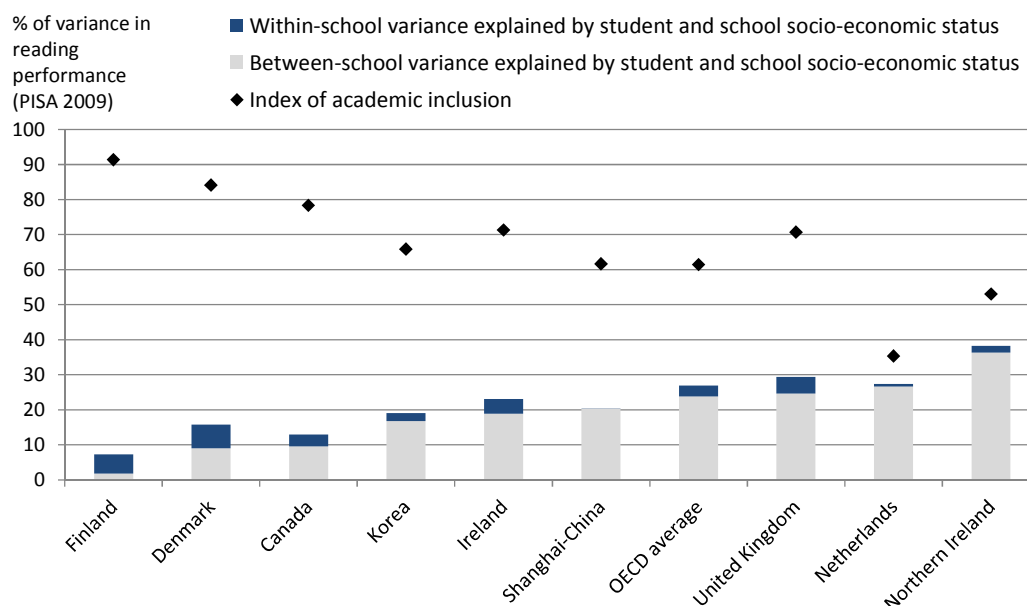
Note: The index of academic inclusion used in PISA indicates the proportion of performance variance within schools.

Source: OECD (2010b), *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes (Volume II)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091504-en (Tables S.II.i and II.5.1)

National statistics clearly show the distribution of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils among different post-primary schools (Tables 1.4 and 1.5). In Northern Ireland, socio-economic disadvantage is measured by a pupil's entitlement to free school meals. In 2012/13, 27,701 pupils in post-primary schools were registered as being entitled to free school meals, representing 19.0% of the pupil cohort (Table 1.4). Academically selective schools have a more advantaged socio-economic intake: there are fewer than 10% of pupils entitled to free school meals in 56 of the 68 grammar schools (Table 1.5). This stands in stark contrast to the equivalent figure for non-selective post-primary schools (only 1 of the 147 in total). These figures are all the more striking considering that by far the highest number of grammar schools is in the Belfast area, where there is the largest proportion of post-primary pupils entitled to free school meals (30%). Purvis et al. (2011) find that while academic selection does not cause social division in Northern Ireland, it does accentuate it.

Table 1.4 Distribution of disadvantaged pupils in different school management types (2012/13)

| | Percentage of pupils receiving free school meals at school | | |
| | | Ranging… | |
Type of school by category of school management	Average (%)	… from a minimum of (%)	…to a maximum of (%)
All post-primary schools	19.0	1.1	70.0
- of which: selective schools	7.4	1.1	23.2
- of which: non-selective schools	27.8	6.8	70.0
Voluntary (all selective schools)	7.9	1.1	23.2
Maintained (all non-selective schools)	32.2	13.0	70.0
Controlled	16.9	1.8	54.7
- of which: selective schools	5.8	1.8	23.0
- of which: non-selective schools	22.6	6.8	54.7

Source: DENI (2013b), *Post primary schools data 2012/13*, Excel file, www.deni.gov.uk/post_primary_schools_data_2012_13_supp_inc_unfilled_places.xlsx, accessed 21 November 2013.

Attending an academically selective school is strongly linked with greater chances of success in key examinations (General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSE] and General Certificate of Education Advanced level [A level]) or equivalent qualifications. Using the government's benchmark of a student achieving at least five GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C, including the subjects of English and mathematics, 92.9% of Year 12 students in grammar schools achieved this in 2011/12 (this was 93.8% in 2008/09) (DENI, 2013c). The equivalent figure for non-selective post-primary schools in 2011/12 was 36.2%, representing an increase from 32.9% in 2008/09 (DENI, 2013c).

Table 1.5 Distribution of disadvantaged pupils in academically selective schools (2012/13)

| | Number of schools in this category | | |
% of pupils entitled to free school meals at school	All post-primary schools	Grammar schools	Non-selective schools
0-10%	57	56	1
10.1-20%	56	10	46
20.1-30%	47	2	45
30.1-40%	28	0	28
40.1-50%	14	0	14
50.1-60%	9	0	9
60.1-70%	4	0	4
Average %:	19.0%	7.4%	27.8%

Source: DENI (2013b), *Post primary schools data 2012/13*, Excel file, www.deni.gov.uk/post_primary_schools_data_2012_13_supp_inc_unfilled_places.xlsx, accessed 21 November 2013.

The concentration of less socio-economically advantaged students in some schools is a recognised challenge in Northern Ireland. As well as the impact this has on student success in key examinations, it poses additional challenges, such as student absence from school. There is an absence rate of 11.7% in post-primary schools with at least 50% of students entitled to free school meals, compared to 4.6% in schools with fewer than 10% of students entitled to free school meals (ETI, 2012). External school evaluations have shown evidence of schools rising to these challenges and sheds light on some school factors that help to mitigate the impact of socio-economic factors on student learning. Among other factors, the setting of challenging targets for learner success based on a wide range of student performance data has been highlighted (ETI, 2012).

Some important successes in the post-primary sector, but a need for improvement in many schools

At Key Stage 3, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) judges that there is an appropriate focus on learning and skills development (ETI, 2012). Most post-primary schools evaluated during the period 2010 to 2012 by the ETI were judged to have good or better pastoral care (ETI, 2012) and over two-thirds of post-primary schools have good or better Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in place. However, the ETI highlights key concerns in the post-primary sector. Among the post-primary schools evaluated during the period 2010 to 2012, the ETI found that in almost one in five the principal was less than satisfactory, which mirrors findings over the two previous inspection periods (ETI, 2012). Processes for school self-evaluation (data use and monitoring) are relatively less developed than in the primary sector. The ETI judged that actions for improvement were not good enough in nearly 50% of the schools evaluated (ETI, 2012). Of the 13 post-primary schools that had entered the Formal Intervention Process (FIP) since 2009 (see below), one has successfully exited this and another has been closed (ETI, 2012). Reasons for slower improvement rates for post-primary schools in the FIP are identified by the ETI as additional challenges posed by larger school size and, in some cases, a need to regain community confidence.

Low levels of educational attainment heighten the risk of economic marginalisation

As in other OECD countries, the economic crisis has been a major blow to the youth of Northern Ireland. The estimated unemployment rate for 18 to 24 year olds is 24.7% over the period July to September 2013 – up 5.5 percentage points over the year.[13] This compares to the overall unemployment rate over the same period estimated at 7.3%. International data reveal lower levels of employment for individuals with lower educational attainment levels in general (Figure 1.6). On average in the OECD, employment rates for younger people with lower levels of education have reduced more sharply during the economic crisis than for their counterparts with higher levels of education (Figure 1.6). The employment rate for all school leavers in Northern Ireland has fallen between 2007/08 and 2011/12 from 10.2% to 6.2%. However, this has not seen an increase in school leavers unemployed, but rather an increase in the uptake of further or higher education among school leavers.[14]

Figure 1.6 Lower employment rates for individuals with lower education levels
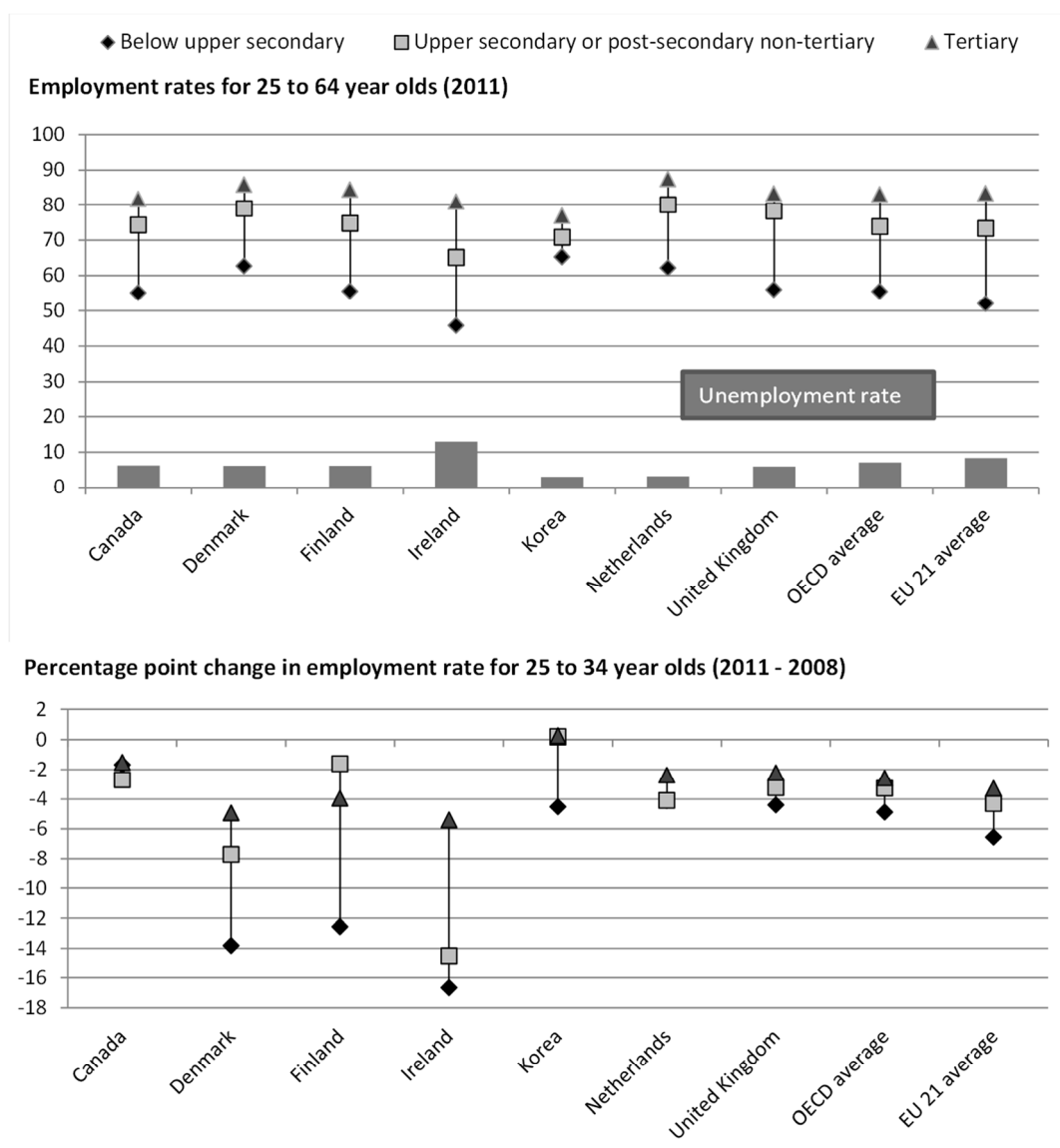
Source: OECD (2013a), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/eag-2013-en

Main developments

Since 2007, a less prescriptive curriculum with a focus on knowledge and cross-curricular skills

In 2007, a revised statutory curriculum was phased in to all schools receiving public funding (grant aided). The revised curriculum aims to: be more relevant to the needs, aspirations and career prospects of all young people; promote a greater focus on skills and their application, as well as knowledge, and on connecting learning across the curriculum; introduce more freedom to teachers for planning and delivering lessons, by reducing the level of prescription and stipulating statutory minimum content.

The focus on skills runs throughout the curriculum. The core cross-curricular skills include: Communication (literacy); Using mathematics (numeracy); and Using ICT. Other skills specified in the curriculum are "Thinking skills and personal capabilities".

Introduction of a follow-up mechanism in school inspection

In 2009, the Department of Education launched the Every School a Good School policy. This creates a follow-up mechanism in external school evaluation, known as the Formal Intervention Process (FIP). The Department of Education places a school into the FIP if the quality of its education provision has been evaluated as less than satisfactory by the ETI. The FIP aims to provide intensive support to schools to support their improvement. Over the period 2009-2012, 21 primary schools and 13 post-primary schools have entered the FIP (ETI, 2012).

Adapting assessment policies to align with the revised curriculum

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has developed Levels of Progression as reference standards for student assessment in cross-curricular skills at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Schools are legally required to monitor pupils' progress against these and to report on pupil progress to their parents at least once a year. For Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, teachers' professional judgements of student performance in literacy and numeracy against the levels of progression are collected centrally to provide measures of system performance and benchmarks that can be used by schools in their self-evaluation.

Northern Ireland provides national assessment at the primary level as a diagnostic tool to support assessment for and of learning (DENI, 2013d). These are computer-based adaptive assessments with two distinct tests: one in literacy and one in numeracy. National diagnostic assessments were phased in over a three year period from 2007/08, but the test provider changed in 2012. At the time of the OECD review, it was mandatory for all primary schools to conduct these assessments, but there was an ongoing review of the computer-based assessments and related policy. An announcement by the Minister in May 2013 determined these becoming voluntary from 2013/14.[15] Although schools may choose not to administer the national assessments, they will still be required to use diagnostic testing and to report on pupil progress to parents.

Creating a single authority for school management and support

The 2011-2015 Programme for Government specifies the creation of a single education authority – the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). This is subject to completion of the Education Bill 2012. The creation of this single authority is expected to significantly streamline the governance of the school system. As envisaged in the Education Bill introduced into the Assembly in October 2012, the ESA would be the funding and employing authority for all schools receiving public funding (grant aided). The ESA would take on responsibility for school support services that were previously offered by the Education and Library Board Curriculum and Advisory Support Services.

Introducing rights for students to choose among a broad selection of subjects

The Entitlement Framework sets requirements to ensure that all students in school from Key Stage 4 onwards have access to a wide range of general and applied courses. This guarantees students the right to access a broad range of subjects, regardless of the location or type of school they attend. From September 2013, all post-primary schools

receiving public funding (grant aided) must offer a minimum of 18 courses – of which at least six (one third), must be applied courses and at least six must be general courses. The entitlement framework is being phased in from 2013 to 2015. By 2015, all students should have access to 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and to 27 courses in non-compulsory schooling (Post-16 or Key Stage 5).

Notes

1. www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/population-and-household-estimates-for-the-united-kingdom/index.html

2 . Full statistics can be accessed via the interactive map presenting statistical information collected during the school census on the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency website: www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/InteractiveMaps/Children%20Education%20and%20Skills/School%20and%20College%20Education/PrimaryPostPrimary/atlas.html

3 . All national employment statistics in this paragraph are estimates for the period July to September 2013. See "Statistical Press Release – Labour Market Statistics November 2013": www.detini.gov.uk/labour_market_press_release_-_november_2013__final_.pdf

4 . Unemployment rates for 25 to 64 year olds in 2011: the United Kingdom 6.0%; OECD average 7.1%; Ireland 12.9%; average for the 21 European Union members within the OECD 8.4% (OECD, 2013a).

5 . International data for 2011 give the employment rates as: 73% on average in the OECD; 75% in the United Kingdom; 72% in the 21 European Union members within the OECD; and 66% in Ireland (OECD, 2013a).

6 . For further information, see: www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community

7 . For further information, see: www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/shared_education.htm

8. The international standard classification of education systems (ISCED) uses the term "secondary education" comprising lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and upper secondary education (ISCED 3). Both ISCED 2 and 3 are offered in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. This report will use the term "post-primary" as used in Northern Ireland. A grade A*-C GCSE corresponds to an ISCED 3 qualification and a grade D-G GCSE corresponds to an ISCED 2 qualification.

9 . See Chart 3 in: www.deni.gov.uk/omnibus_survey_-_education_module_findings_april_2011.pdf

10 . In PISA 2009, mean performance for students Northern Ireland was: 499 in reading (OECD average = 493); 492 in mathematics (OECD average = 496); and 511 in science (OECD average = 501).

11 . The other systems presented in this section include: Shangai-China as the top performer overall in PISA 2009; Korea and Finland as OECD systems that have performed consistently among the top performing systems in all PISA surveys; Canada as an OECD system that has performed consistently above average in all PISA surveys; the Netherlands as an OECD system with a high degree of academic differentiation and a long established School Inspectorate that performs above the OECD average; Denmark as an OECD system with around average performance in all PISA surveys and a keen political interest to improve literacy and numeracy with the introduction of computer based adaptive national assessments; and the United Kingdom and Ireland for local benchmarking. Also, similar to Northern Ireland,

Denmark and the Netherlands are two of the five OECD systems using national learning progressions as a reference to monitor system performance (OECD, 2013b).

12 .   The PISA index of economic, social and cultural status of students alone (excluding schools) explains 5.2% of between school variance (OECD average = 8.5%) and 2.0% of within school variance (OECD average = 3.2) (OECD 2010b).

13 .   See "Statistical Press Release – Labour Market Statistics November 2013": www.detini.gov.uk/labour_market_press_release_-_november_2013__final_.pdf

14 .   See Table 21 in: www.deni.gov.uk/qualifications_and_destinations_1112.pdf

15 .   See: www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/assessment/computer_based_assessment/LettertoSchoolsNINA-NILAmay2013.pdf

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Chapter 2

Evaluation and assessment framework

In important ways, Northern Ireland stands out internationally. As in all systems within the OECD review, different components (pupil assessment, school evaluation, teacher and school leader appraisal and school system evaluation) have been developed at different stages, but policy development in Northern Ireland aims to bring these together into a more coherent framework. There is a clear expectation that evaluation and assessment lead to improved pupil learning and outcomes but also a need for continued attention to implementing these policies.

This chapter looks at the overall framework for evaluation and assessment in Northern Ireland, including: student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation. It will explore the coherence of the whole as well as the articulation between the different components. Chapters 3 to 6 will analyse the issues relevant to each individual component in more depth.

This report differentiates between the terms "assessment", "appraisal" and "evaluation". The term "assessment" is used to refer to judgements on individual student progress and achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessments as well as large-scale, external tests and examinations. The term "appraisal" is used to refer to judgements on the performance of school-level professionals, *e.g.* teachers and principals. Finally, the term "evaluation" is used to refer to judgements on the effectiveness of schools, school systems, policies and programmes.

Context and features

Governance

Northern Ireland's approach to evaluation and assessment combines: central control over policy development and standard setting; transparency over procedures and reporting of results; an increasing responsibility for the implementation of evaluation and assessment among teachers and schools; and central mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of implementation. Schools and their Boards of Governors are accountable for their educational quality and are expected to monitor and report on this to their communities as part of a centrally specified school development planning process. At the same time, school quality and development planning processes are monitored by the Department of Education's Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Teachers play a central role in student assessment and also in providing key information for accountability at the system level. At the primary level, central diagnostic tests are provided to support teachers in assessing pupil progress. At the same time, teachers' assessment of pupil progress against central standards is moderated by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). High stakes assessment for pupils at the end of compulsory education is undertaken within an external examination system. The exception to this general approach is teacher appraisal, which remains entirely school based, although the Board of Governors is expected to monitor the school leader's implementation of teacher appraisal as part of the school principal appraisal process.

Key components

Northern Ireland's approach to evaluation and assessment consists of the following five main components:

- **Student assessment**. Teachers play a central role in both formative and summative student assessment. From 2012/13, teachers are required to assess pupil progress in all aspects of Northern Ireland's curriculum and provide annual reports to parents. Teacher assessments of pupil progress in literacy and numeracy must be reported to the Department of Education at the end of Key Stages 1 (Year 4), 2 (Year 7) and 3 (Year 10, in post-primary school). Primary schools can administer central computer-based adaptive tests in literacy and numeracy (Years 4 to 7). At Key Stages 4 and 5 pupils study towards qualifications that are recognised throughout the United Kingdom, largely but not exclusively, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of

Education Advanced Level (A Level). These include a strong component of external examinations, but may also include coursework and controlled internal assessment.

- **Teacher appraisal**. Regular teacher appraisal is conducted as part of the annual Performance Review and Staff Development scheme (PRSD). Introduced in 2005, this is an internal school process comprising: an initial meeting to set three objectives; monitoring, including classroom and/or task observation during the year; and a review discussion at the end of the year to produce a review statement. Principals are responsible for the implementation of PRSD, but this may be conducted by senior members of the school staff. The primary purpose of PRSD is to inform teacher professional development needs and to link these to the School Development Plan. Results may also be considered when making decisions about teachers' promotion. New teachers receive a "career entry profile" at the end of their initial education and must complete a one-year induction period during which they prepare a personal two-year action plan for Early Professional Development. They are supported by a tutor within the school. PRSD results do not feed into school inspection. Teacher registration is not linked to teacher appraisal. A new procedure aims to prevent and address underperformance more effectively.

- **School principal appraisal**. School principals are appraised on an annual basis by the Board of Governors within the PRSD scheme (see above). "Leadership and management" is one of three key areas evaluated in school inspections.

- **School evaluation**. The *Every School a Good School* policy (DENI, 2009) emphasises both the school's responsibility for its standards and the role of self-evaluation in school improvement. The Board of Governors is responsible for the School Development Plan, to which school self-evaluation is linked, although this is typically delegated to school principals. Schools must report annually to their community. Schools benefit from analytical software systems and benchmarked data, and can choose from many supporting materials developed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). School inspections are well established and the ETI is introducing a more proportionate, risk-based approach. The school development planning process and school progress toward related targets is inspected. The procedures and results of school inspections are published. The ETI engages school principals and senior educators in school inspection. The Department of Education sets targets for school system performance at different stages of education and individual school performance on these measures is published, but schools are not ranked in league tables.

- **System evaluation**. The Department of Education is responsible for system evaluation and operates within a wider public sector environment of accountability. At the Executive level, Programme for Government targets have been set for pupil attainment at the end of compulsory schooling. Schools report key information to the Department of Education accordingly, including contextual information. Since 2012/13, schools must report on teacher assessments of pupil performance at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in literacy and numeracy. A moderation system has been introduced to heighten the comparability of results. An overview of key results from regular school inspections, plus surveys on particular themes conducted by the ETI provide valuable information. Information from international student assessments provides comparative performance

measures. System performance results are published in statistical circulars with benchmark information.

Responsibilities for evaluation and assessment

The Department of Education is responsible for the development of the evaluation and assessment framework. Within the Department of Education, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) conducts external school evaluation and is responsible for advising the further development of policies in this area. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment was created in 1993 and takes responsibility for the development of curriculum, national assessment tools and guidance and student summative assessment, including certification at end of Key Stage 4 and above.

Strengths

Recognition of the potential synergies among different components of evaluation and assessment

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have revealed the challenges faced by all systems in designing a coherent evaluation and assessment framework. Many systems have underdeveloped components within the framework and typically each component has been developed at different stages and evolved at a different pace (OECD, 2013). An important aspect in designing an effective evaluation and assessment framework is to be strategic in linking the different components in order to generate complementarities, avoid duplication, and prevent inconsistency of objectives (OECD, 2013). In important ways, Northern Ireland stands out internationally. First, each of the major components is well developed, especially student assessment, school evaluation and system evaluation. Second, policies reflect the importance of articulating the different individual components and recognising their potential synergies. For example:

- School self-evaluation and student assessment: Content requirements in School Development Plans include provision for school self-evaluation of "learning, teaching, assessment, and promoting the raising of standards of attainment among all pupils, in particular in communication, using mathematics and using Information and Communications Technologies (ICT); providing for the professional development of staff;"[1]

- School inspection and student assessment: school inspection pays attention to the school's assessment policies, including pupil involvement in self-assessment and peer assessment.

- School inspection and system evaluation: The ETI produces a biennial summative report on the education system. The *Count, Read: Succeed* strategy foresees that school inspections will lead to reporting at the system level on standards in literacy and numeracy and on the implementation and effectiveness of this literacy and numeracy strategy (DENI, 2011, p.21).

- Teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation: the teacher appraisal model intends to articulate teacher appraisal, school self-evaluation and school development. One or two of the three personal objectives teachers set in their appraisal are typically school-wide objectives. Teachers' identified professional development needs should feed into the overall school development plan. The Board of

Governors assesses the adequacy of teacher appraisal at the school as part of school principal appraisal.

- System evaluation, school evaluation and student assessment: the results from student summative assessments form the basis of key measures in system evaluation and provide information and benchmarks for school self-evaluation and school inspection.

- School leader appraisal and teacher appraisal: The Board of Governors should ensure that the professional development and performance of teachers is reviewed annually in accordance with the PRSD scheme (Chapter 5).

Within the school evaluation component, the different elements are further articulated:

- School inspection reports should include an assessment of school development planning. In turn, there is a clear expectation that identified areas for improvement in school inspections are incorporated into the school development planning process.

- Common tools and indicators are available for school inspection and school self-evaluation. Also, common measures of student performance provide evidence for both types of school evaluation.

- Senior educators are engaged in school inspection, which promotes a common evaluative approach.

In addition to ensuring articulations between and within components, an important aspect to promote better synergies is the moderation of processes to ensure consistent application of procedures (OECD, 2013). A major challenge to the Northern Ireland evaluation and assessment framework is the duplication of student assessment procedures (see below). In this context, the introduction of a moderation procedure for end of Key Stage assessments is expected to reduce tensions by increasing trust among primary and post-primary schools in the reliability of assessments and reducing the use of additional assessment procedures (Chapters 3 and 6).

The expectation that evaluation and assessment lead to improved student learning and outcomes

The highest profile communication regarding evaluation and assessment is arguably the setting of targets for system-wide improvement in Northern Ireland. This takes the target setting within the wider government context of high accountability and promotes improvement in student outcomes (Chapter 6). Targets also communicate the expectation that this leads to improvement for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (see below). The Department of Education through its key policies communicates the expectation that learning targets are applied and followed at the individual pupil level.

The Education and Training Inspectorate communicates its mission as "promoting improvement in the interest of all learners" and has introduced over recent years a clearer reporting format in individual school inspection reports to highlight key areas for improvement (Chapter 5). School inspection examines both centrally available and school generated data on student performance and learning progress. Analysis of a random selection of individual school reports also shows that inspectors pay attention to the progression of pupils with special educational needs. There is a recent policy to pay

greater attention to specific outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The *Count, Read: Succeed* strategy stipulates that school inspection reports will include an assessment of pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy and the quality of teaching and learning. Further, individual school inspections will provide evidence on literacy and numeracy standards at the system level.

There is clear communication that the purpose of centrally provided computer-based assessments at the primary level is to support diagnostic and formative assessment; this is bolstered by the policy to not collect results centrally (Chapter 3).

Official policy puts pupils at the centre of the evaluation and assessment framework

In Northern Ireland, there is a high degree of coherence between the curriculum and official policy in putting pupils at the centre of evaluation and assessment processes, which is a desirable principle in the design of the evaluation and assessment framework (OECD, 2013). For example, both the curriculum and school inspection promote the active involvement of pupils in assessment (Chapter 3). There is also a strong official focus on formative and diagnostic assessment of pupil learning progress. The Entitlement Framework (Chapter 1) seeks to ensure more options for pupils in their school studies. The pupil focus is clear in the key official policies and reporting, for example:

- *Every School a Good School (ESaGS)*: The first of the key principles listed is that "the interests of pupils rather than institutions must be at the centre of efforts to improve educational achievement and tackle underachievement" (DENI, 2009, p.13). For example, there is a specific goal to: "provide a resource to support school councils and to encourage all schools to set up councils or other forums to ensure that pupils have a voice in decisions on the running of the school" (DENI, 2009, p.41).

- *Count, Read: Succeed*: "It must be a central purpose of our schools, supported by parents, to ensure that pupils develop the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to succeed at school and later on, in life and at work." (DENI, 2011, p.8)

- *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012*: "We are totally learner-focused and make our evaluations in the interest of the learner, based on first-hand evidence." (Preface by the Chief Inspector, ETI, 2012).

Recognition of the importance of equity

In most countries there is an emergent focus on equity and inclusion among educational goals (OECD, 2013). An overview of evidence on the school system in Northern Ireland identifies the importance of ensuring that evaluation and assessment processes pay adequate attention to improving equity within the system (Chapter 1). One of two overarching goals for the Department of Education is "Closing the performance gap, increasing equity and equality" (Chapter 6). The most recent target setting exercise by the Minister and the Department of Education has an explicit focus on tackling disadvantage. There are specific targets set to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils (measured as those entitled to free school meals) successfully achieving five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications or equivalent with grades A* to C (including GCSEs in mathematics and English). The 1998 literacy and numeracy strategy did not include specific targets to increase outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The Minister wishes to communicate, via the target setting exercise, clear

expectations for improvement in the educational outcomes of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Following a review of the Special Education Needs (SEN) policy and supporting framework, a revised SEN policy is positioned within the raising standards agenda of ESaGS and will, for example: ensure the child is placed firmly at the centre of the process for identification assessment, provision and review; ensure the special education support needs of all children are met in school and the support services (ELB or new ESA); put a clear focus on learning and outcomes for pupils with SEN, ensuring that the views of parents and pupils are heard (p. 21, DENI, 2013). The revised SEN policy will be supported by changes to primary legislation, revised SEN regulations and a Code of Practice.

The Entitlement Framework (Chapter 1) aims to ensure pupils have access to a wider choice of educational provision that is effectively planned on an area basis. The Department of Education aims to tackle the underachievement of boys with, among other approaches, an advertising campaign to attract more men into the teaching profession. The Department of Education has also run a publicity campaign about valuing education to promote the importance of parents being behind school and sharing ambition for their children. The narrative here is to tackle the "Poverty of aspiration".

Potential to redesign and improve the quality of support offered to schools

The Department of Education envisages the creation of a central Education and Skills Authority (ESA) (Chapter 1). The creation of this single authority is expected to significantly streamline the governance of the school system, with the potential to free up more resources for school support services. The school support function would also be taken up by the ESA, replacing the current support structures offered by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs). An efficiency review found marked variation between the ELBs in the amount of core funding they allocated to the Curriculum Advisory Support Services (CASS), which was interpreted to reflect significant differences in the relative value and priority attached to CASS (DENI and DFPNI, 2011). Departmental policy aims to promote "greater coherence and consistency in the provision of support to schools" (DENI, 2011, p.16). This presents an opportunity to draw on the best practices in current school support services and to review ways to further improve school support (Chapter 5).

Schools in Northern Ireland already benefit from a rich set of supporting tools to help with school self-evaluation and the monitoring of pupil learning progress. The major needs going forward are to further strengthen capacity for school self-evaluation and for student formative and summative assessment against the Levels of Progression. In particular, the ESA would provide support to schools in preparing their School Development Plan and could build the Board of Governors' capacity in challenging school principals and monitoring school self-evaluation (Chapter 5).

Attention to using a broad set of evidence in policy making

Northern Ireland is an evidence rich system. There are established information and reporting systems and there is attention to mobilising these results for policy makers (Chapter 6). There is also a breadth of measures available on student outcomes, including the collection of qualitative measures via school inspections (Chapters 5 and 6). Evidence is therefore available on pastoral care and pupil well-being, in addition to specific research surveys. The curriculum is broad and new assessment arrangements aim to

promote a more rounded assessment of pupils' knowledge and skills (Chapter 3). Northern Ireland has also engaged in more international comparative surveys to evaluate the system from a broader perspective (Chapter 6). School inspections are firmly based in the collection of first-hand evidence, notably by a well-developed system of the direct observation of the teaching and learning process (Chapter 5).

An approach to build on teacher professionalism

The OECD review team notes that teachers are respected and trusted professionals in Northern Ireland (Chapter 4). Official policy aims to build on and strengthen teacher professionalism. This is of key importance as the ability for the evaluation and assessment framework to effect changes in the classroom and improve student learning largely depends on teacher professionalism (OECD, 2013). In Northern Ireland, there is a strong official focus on teachers' professional judgement in student assessment policy (Chapter 3). Official policy aims to build on and strengthen the levels of assessment literacy among teachers. The new moderation procedure for key stage assessment holds strong potential to build teacher capacity in student summative assessment against the Levels of Progression (Chapter 6).

Of equal importance is the approach to engage educators in pilots and the development of key policies. While the OECD review team noted some concerns on the feedback of teacher views in specific pilots (Chapter 3), the general approach is sound. There are also open communication channels between the Department of Education and the trade unions. The OECD review team noted the commitment from the Minister to working with trade unions in refining policies. An example is the decision (subsequent to the OECD review visit) based on feedback from educators to change the status of computer-based assessments at the primary level from compulsory to optional in 2013/14. The Minister also wishes to strengthen the General Teaching Council as a professional body, a move that is support by the business community (CBI, 2012).

The OECD review team learned from representatives of trade unions that there was broad support for the official policies regarding the introduction of the new assessment arrangements (see also, ATL, 2010), as well as recognition of the need to improve equality within Northern Ireland's school system.

Principle of transparency in reporting results of evaluation and assessment

The overall evaluation and assessment framework can be strengthened through transparency in monitoring and publishing results (OECD, 2013). In Northern Ireland, there is a clear policy for transparency and accountability. The results of evaluation and assessment are reported. School inspection reports are published on the ETI website, system level results are reported in statistical bulletins on the Department of Education's website, school level results are available on the Schools+ Database on the Department of Education's website, and the CCEA publishes aggregate results of the Key Stage assessments.

Challenges

Some duplication and inconsistencies within the evaluation and assessment framework

Although there is a clear reflection in official policy on how to articulate the different components of the evaluation and assessment framework, there is a need to go further. In particular to create better synergies between:

- School self-evaluation and school inspection. Where school self-evaluation procedures are highly developed, there is a concern that school inspection may "double up" on procedures in self-evaluation (Chapter 5).

- Student assessment at primary and post-primary levels. While there is a rich documentation of pupil progress and level of progression in primary schools, many post-primary schools do not use this information to inform subsequent teaching once a pupil is accepted and a high number administer unregulated entrance tests; duplicating assessment for pupils (Chapter 3).

- Teacher registration, career progression and teacher appraisal. The role of teacher registration is not clear and there is limited use of the results of teacher appraisal to inform career progression (Chapter 4).

In important areas there are also challenges to ensure greater consistency:

- Teacher appraisal. Despite the existence of a set of teacher competency standards, these are often not used as a common reference in teacher appraisal (Chapter 4). There are variations in the implementation of the PRSD scheme and there is no external validation of teacher appraisal processes.

- School leader appraisal. School leadership standards do not appear to be widely used and the Board of Governors' capacity to conduct school leader appraisal varies (Chapter 5).

Lack of broad political support for assessment policy

A polarised political debate over the testing of pupils for post-primary school selection is impeding the effective implementation of pupil assessment against the Levels of Progression and, by extension, the Northern Ireland curriculum. This is penalising pupils and is reportedly creating unnecessary stress and duplication of work for teachers in many primary schools (Chapter 3).

The OECD review team met with representatives of employers and the teaching profession and noted a high level of support for the Northern Ireland curriculum. The CBI (2012) welcomes the focus of the Northern Ireland curriculum. The curriculum and key stage assessment policies are designed around pupil progression through the school system. However, there is a real risk that political tensions will create a lack of coherence in pupils' assessment through the school system. Although a robust moderation procedure is being implemented to increase the reliability of teacher assessments at the primary level, the political debate on one side fuels the perception that there is a need to duplicate pupil assessment, and on the other limits the potential in the new moderation procedures to better meet the information needs of all post-primary schools.

Building credibility and capacity in the proposed school support model (ESA)

With the accent on further strengthening teacher professionalism, the OECD review identifies a need to build credibility among educators in the proposed school support model: the Education and Skills Authority. The capacity within the proposed authority will be crucial in introducing sufficient balance across the system between the support and challenge functions. At the time of the OECD review, there was a high degree of uncertainty among educators about the form the new support model would take. The fact that the school inspection approach identifies schools most in need of improvement sends the signal that support services should primarily target schools most in need of improvement (Chapter 5). Depending on the capacity available in the proposed ESA, such a strategy is likely to impact on a wider offer of professional development services to all schools. It is as yet unclear to what extent the proposed support model would draw on current expertise from schools. Principals and teachers are more likely to listen to advice from people in the school system who have faced similar challenges.

Implementation can be tokenistic

The student assessment and system evaluation policies have been formulated to align assessment processes to Northern Ireland's knowledge and skills based curriculum (Chapter 3). However, teachers have reservations about the implementation of assessment against the Levels of Progression. At the same time, schools like the functionality of commercial tests to assess pupil progress, although these may not be aligned to curriculum. If standards are poorly designed or not specific enough, teachers are more likely to focus on tests, thus narrowing the focus of teaching (Stecher et al., 2000). A key tension in relation to the implementation of the curriculum at Key Stage 2 is the use of unregulated transfer tests by a number of post-primary schools. There is no guarantee that these tests are aligned to the Northern Ireland curriculum, but they reportedly influence what is taught in some primary schools (Chapter 3). Such misalignment can have serious consequences on instruction and learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

There are also variations in the implementation of the PRSD scheme and this impacts primarily teacher appraisal, but also school principal appraisal (Chapters 4 and 5). Teachers may feel that teacher appraisal does not focus sufficiently on their individual professional development needs and/or feel that there is inadequate provision of professional learning opportunities (Chapter 4).

In general, the lack of "social alignment" impedes system learning and improvement (Looney, 2011a). All evaluation activities require good "social alignment", i.e. social capital in systems, including shared values, motives and efforts around educational goals and the principles underlining them (Baker, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003).

Policy options

The analysis above notes that the evaluation and assessment framework in Northern Ireland has been developed using the majority of key principles of design recommended by the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education. The policy options below focus on consolidating this and building consensus and capacity to ensure effective implementation:

- Further integrate the evaluation and assessment framework

- Prioritise efforts to effectively implement the evaluation and assessment framework

- Continue the approach to draw on teacher professionalism

- Engage educators in designing future school support services

- Provide platforms for informed debate among key stakeholders

- Raise public awareness of the importance of equity and the shift to competencies

- Prioritise building credibility for the new approach

Further integrate the evaluation and assessment framework

In many ways, Northern Ireland stands out internationally as having a more strategic approach to the development of the evaluation and assessment framework. Many aspects are thoughtfully designed and there is a high degree of articulation between the different evaluation components. The OECD review team has identified ways to further integrate the evaluation and assessment framework. In school evaluation, there is room to go further in linking school inspection with self-evaluation (Chapter 5). The other points relate to reducing inconsistencies. In student assessment, this relates to the new moderation procedures for end of key stage assessments. Moderation is expected to reduce inconsistencies up to the end of Key Stage 3 and importantly, once implemented, reduce duplication of student assessment, particularly during Key Stage 2. In going forward, there is an urgent need to build teachers' trust in the new moderation system and to seek and communicate ways to minimise the reporting burden on schools.

Prioritise efforts to effectively implement the evaluation and assessment framework

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have resulted in a set of recommendations for implementing the evaluation and assessment framework (Box 2.1). Effective implementation seeks to strike the right balance between the combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives, which is generally believed to foster consensus (Finlay et al., 1998). For example, in the Netherlands, policy aims to seek the correct balance between four co-ordinating mechanisms: steering by the government; steering by professionals; competition among schools; co-operation among schools. The benefits of competition include a heightened response to stakeholder needs, while greater co-operation among schools can save resources and generate societal wellbeing (Dutch Ministry of Education and Science, 2013). Specific recommendations for Northern Ireland are elaborated in Box 2.1 on the following page.

Box 2.1 OECD recommendations for implementing the evaluation and assessment framework

Engage stakeholders and practitioners in the designing and implementing evaluation and assessment policies

A range of strategies to consolidate the implementation of evaluation and assessment policies are available. To start with, the policy development process is more likely to yield consensus and compromise among parties if policies are developed by different stakeholders co-operating towards a common goal. Regular interactions contribute to building trust among different stakeholders and raising awareness for the major concerns of others, thereby enhancing the inclination of the different parties for compromise. Educational evaluation policy has much more to gain from the cross-fertilisation of the distinct perspectives into compromises than from antagonism and the imposition of particular views over other stakeholder groups. Teachers will more easily accept to be evaluated if they are consulted in the design of the process. By taking their fears and claims into account, teachers' professionalism, the scarcity of their skills, and the extent of their responsibilities is recognised. If teacher appraisal procedures are unilaterally designed at the level of the administrative structure, without addressing and including the core of teaching practice, then there will be a "loose coupling" between administrators and teachers, that will both fail to provide public guarantees of quality, and will discourage reflection and review among teachers themselves (Elmore, 2000; Kleinhenz and Ingvarson, 2004).

In more general terms, this calls for practitioners such as school leaders and teachers to be engaged in the design, management and analysis of evaluation and assessment policies. Consensus building among stakeholders is all the more important since local actors may be in the best position to foresee unintended consequences and judge what is feasible in practice.

Communicate the rationale for reform

Another priority is to clearly communicate a long-term vision of what is to be accomplished for student learning as the rationale for proposed evaluation and assessment policies. Individuals and groups are more likely to accept changes that are not necessarily in their own best interests if they understand the reasons for these changes and can see the role they should play within the broad national strategy. This includes dissemination of the evidence basis underlying the policy diagnosis, research findings on alternative policy options and their likely impact, as well as information on the costs of reform vs. inaction. Such communication and dissemination is critical to gain the support of society at large for educational evaluation reforms, not just the stakeholders with a direct interest.

Use pilots before full implementation and review implementation

Policy experimentation and the use of pilots may prove effective strategies to overcome blockages dictated by disagreements among stakeholders and to assess the effectiveness of policy innovations before generalising them. Policy makers need to ensure mechanisms and platforms for the ongoing review and development of evaluation and appraisal systems are up-to-date with latest research and developments (*e.g.* through advisory or steering groups). In the same way, education practitioners should be provided opportunities to express their views and concerns on given evaluation and assessment initiatives as these are implemented. Implementation should involve feedback loops that allow adjustments to be made. School agents should be provided with opportunities to express their perceptions and concerns on evaluation processes as they are implemented. Interviews and surveys are common methods used to collect feedback on evaluation processes. The items generally include the understanding of the process, the acceptance of the standards, the fairness of the process and of the results, the capability and objectivity of the evaluators, the quality of the feedback received, the perceived impact of the evaluation process on practices, and the overall impression of the evaluation system.

Box 2.1 OECD recommendations for implementing the evaluation and assessment framework *(continued)*

Ensure adequate capacity and sufficient resources

It is essential to develop capacity among stakeholders to implement evaluation and assessment policies. This includes providing support for school agents to understand evaluation procedures, training for evaluators to effectively undertake their responsibilities, and preparation for school agents to use the results of evaluation. Evaluation and assessment are beneficial for improvement of educational practices provided that they engage the skills and commitment of practitioners.

Finally, there is a need for reducing excessive bureaucratic demands on schools and ensuring sufficient resources are provided in the implementation of evaluation and assessment policies. A consequence is that both those being evaluated and evaluators should be partly released from other duties. Schools agents should have time to reflect on their own practices, especially when the process requires self-appraisal and the constitution of a portfolio. Another aim should be reducing the administrative workload for evaluators, especially school leaders, in order to provide them with more time for evaluation activities, feedback and coaching.

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

Continue the approach to draw on teacher professionalism

Teachers are central to securing links between the evaluation and assessment framework and the classroom. This highlights the importance for evaluation and assessment frameworks to draw on the professionalism of teachers in ensuring evaluation and assessment activities result in authentic improvement of classroom practices and student learning (OECD, 2013). The OECD review team commends the approach to build on and secure teacher professionalism in Northern Ireland.

Impacting classroom practice is likely to require the evaluation and assessment framework to place considerable emphasis on its developmental function (OECD, 2013). Channels that are likely to reinforce links to classroom practice include: an emphasis on teacher appraisal for the continuous improvement of teaching practices; ensuring teaching standards are aligned with student learning objectives; involving teachers in school evaluation, in particular through conceiving school self-evaluation as a collective process with responsibilities for teachers; ensuring that teachers are seen as the main experts not only in instructing but also in assessing their students, so teachers feel the ownership of student assessment and accept it as an integral part of teaching and learning; building teacher capacity for student formative assessment; and building teachers' ability to assess against educational standards.

Engage educators in designing future school support services

A strong focus on professionalism implies the need for a significant, sustained and focused investment in professional development. Teachers need to develop skills to assess learning needs and a broad repertoire of strategies to meet a range of student needs. Teacher professionalism also points to a stronger role for teachers in the development of student learning objectives and of assessment and evaluation systems. Based on their review of literature on accountability and classroom instruction, Ballard and Bates (2008)

underscore the importance of communication among teachers and those who write learning objectives, develop large-scale assessments, and set out guidelines for school evaluations.

The OECD review team has underlined the opportunity to improve school support services with the proposed Education and Skills Authority. It is critical that educators are seriously engaged in helping to design these services. Kennedy (2005) argues that a rejection of reform initiatives by highly dedicated teachers does not come from their unwillingness to change or improve, but from "the sad fact that most reforms don't acknowledge the realities of classroom teaching". If teachers are involved in planning and implementing evaluation schemes, they are more likely to sustain reform efforts (Leithwood et al., 2002). It follows that teachers are best placed to communicate the reality of classroom teaching and the major demands for professional development. Research has identified some gaps in the current professional development offer. For example, a gap in provision of continuing professional development and in initial teacher education programmes in building (student) teachers' confidence to address bullying related to perceived or actual disabilities or more broadly to special educational needs (Purdy and Mc Guckin, 2011). Given the increased proportion of pupils with identified special educational needs in Northern Ireland's schools, it would seem likely that there would be demand for a range of different professional development to meet the needs of this heterogeneous pupil group. Teachers can play a crucial role in communicating relative priorities for professional development across the system.

Provide platforms for informed debate among key stakeholders

A study of evidence-informed policy making underlines how the involvement of practitioners (teachers, other educational staff and their unions) in the production of research evidence and in its interpretation and translation into policy gives them a strong sense of ownership and strengthens their confidence in the reform process (OECD, 2007). In Northern Ireland, there is a sound approach to engage educators in the piloting and review of different assessment policies. However, there is room to more systematically engage educators in the discussion of evaluation and assessment results; importantly in the deliberation of how to develop policies to address identified challenges. The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have revealed some examples of how other systems attempt to do this (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2 Stakeholder discussion of major evaluation and assessment results

Conferences to discuss key assessment results and to develop possible actions

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training promotes the discussion and use of results from the national assessments in a number of ways. First, the key results and an analysis of factors associated with achievement are reported on the Ministry's website, in a specific brochure and via a colloquium. Second, the Ministry seeks feedback on the results from key stakeholders, including the school support bodies (School Advisory Services), the Flemish Inspectorate of Education, Institutes responsible for initial teacher education, researchers and publishers etc. Third, following these consultations, the Ministry organises an open conference to discuss possible actions to promote and improve school quality. Fourth, the Ministry and other stakeholders engage in concrete actions based on the results and subsequent discussions. Possible improvements include: updating of the attainment targets; developing or adjusting curricula or teaching materials; adjusting initial teacher education and/or teacher professional development; adjusting school policies; introducing new initiatives to support specific student groups.

> **Box 2.2 Stakeholder discussion of major evaluation and assessment results**
> *(continued)*
>
> **Advisory body representing major stakeholders in schooling**
>
> In Denmark, the School Council for Evaluation and Quality Development of Primary and Lower Secondary Education is an advisory body with representatives from all the major stakeholder groups. The School Council holds an annual meeting at which major evidence on the education system is discussed and debated. This is also supported by the production of an annual report presenting a summary of major research and evidence.
>
> *Source:* Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp Edubron Research Group, 2010; Shewbridge *et al.* 2011.

Raise public awareness of the importance of equity and the shift to competencies

Communication is of significant importance when implementing evaluation and assessment policies (Box 2.1). There is a need for a sustained communication of the rationale for the reforms to pupil assessment. The Department of Education policy documents pay attention to international research and there is a clear commitment to the use of evidence in policy making. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of evidence on the school system and demonstrates the importance of setting high level goals to address inequities. Such evidence needs to be clearly communicated to a broader public. There is a need to go further and to extend the media campaign in raising awareness of the importance of these long-term goals.

Prioritise building credibility for the new approach

In order to ensure a continued commitment to new policies, it is essential to review and refine their implementation as necessary. For example, the review of the computer-based assessments at the primary level conducted during 2013. Such reviews are critical in building credibility for the new approach, and provide a mechanism for listening to schools, recognising any limitations, and addressing issues as a matter of priority. The policy to provide a central diagnostic tool at the primary level to support pupil assessment is commendable, and will help to align assessment practices with the curriculum. The subsequent decision to continue to refine these tests and to offer them to schools, underlines the commitment to providing supporting tools for schools to monitor pupil learning progress.

Notes

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Chapter 3

Student assessment

At the end of compulsory schooling, pupils are assessed in a system of external examinations leading to qualifications recognised throughout the United Kingdom. New pupil assessment procedures support the further implementation of the Northern Ireland curriculum. Teachers are responsible for pupil assessment and must report to parents on their child's progress on at least an annual basis. A set of learning standards (Levels of Progression) has been developed to support a coherent assessment of pupil progress across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in cross-curricular skills. Central computer-based assessments are offered to primary schools to support pupil assessment in Communication and Using Mathematics.

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

Context and features[1]

The approach to student assessment in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, both the curriculum and the evaluation and assessment framework are designed to place the pupil at the centre and to support teacher professionalism (see Chapter 2). In support of this approach, student assessment policy emphasises: the importance of formative assessment to assess pupil progress, to identify individual learning needs and to plan teaching accordingly; and the central role that teachers play in assessing pupil performance for formative and summative purposes.

Aligning assessment with the Northern Ireland curriculum

In 2007, a revised statutory curriculum was introduced with three main objectives: *(i)* to provide a core curriculum relevant to the needs of all pupils; *(ii)* to promote a greater focus on skills as well as knowledge and to connect learning across the curriculum, and *(iii)* to ensure a higher degree of teacher autonomy, leaving more flexibility to teachers in exercising their professional judgement when planning and conducting lessons.

The revised curriculum describes statutory minimum content for all stages of pupil learning in school (from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4), specifying both specific areas of learning and two sets of broad skills: the first comprising Communication (Literacy); Using Mathematics (Numeracy) and Using ICT; and the second comprising Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. The first set of skills is known as the core cross-curricular skills.

The Department of Education has developed new statutory assessment arrangements (implemented from September 2012) that are designed to support the revised curriculum and to emphasise and strengthen teachers' professional judgement when assessing their pupils. These are elaborated below.

Pupil assessment from Foundation Stage to end of Key Stage 3

The Department of Education sets requirements for pupil assessment from the Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 3. The purpose of statutory assessment is to inform teaching and learning and to provide information on pupil progress to parents. Schools are required to assess pupils' learning progress in all aspects of the Northern Ireland curriculum (the areas of learning and the four broad skills described above) and are expected to report pupil assessment outcomes to parents on at least an annual basis. Pupil assessment relies on teachers' judgements and is supported by centrally developed sample assessment tasks, in addition to central diagnostic tests in literacy and numeracy (see below) for Key Stages 1 and 2. Within the curriculum, assessment of pupil progress in the areas of learning, as well as in thinking skills and personal capabilities, is entirely delegated to the schools. Schools and teachers are free to choose different methods to monitor pupil progress and pupil assessment information is

not collected centrally. The assessment data is used at pupil and, potentially, school level. This is also the case for the assessment of pupil progress in the cross-curricular skills at the Foundation Stage.

Levels of Progression (LoP)

In Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, schools are required to assess pupil progress in cross-curricular skills against centrally set Levels of Progression (LoP). The LoP are formulated as a continuum of "can do" statements, ranging from Levels 1 to 7, which are intended to provide information on pupil progress in each of the cross-curricular skills. Teachers are required to assess pupil progress against the LoP on an annual basis. The assessment information is used both formatively to inform teaching and learning, and summatively to evaluate whether pupils have reached individual targets at the end of the year. This information is reported to parents.

The Department of Education specifies levels of skills in Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT that pupils are expected to have acquired by the end of each of these key stages, i.e. in Years 4, 7 and 10. The expected levels are: Level 2 at the end of Key Stage 1; Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2; and Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 3. Schools are required to report pupils' assessed level of progression to the Department of Education. In this way, assessment data are also used as an indicator of how the Northern Ireland school system is performing (see Chapter 6). This approach is intended to support the official strategy to improve pupil outcomes in numeracy and literacy (DENI, 2011) and to "balance requirements" at the three following levels (DENI, 2013a):

1. Pupil level: to inform teaching and learning by helping teachers to identify pupil learning needs and to shape subsequent teaching (formative purposes) and to assess whether pupils have reached the expected standards (summative purposes).

2. School level: to provide information to school principals and other members of the school leadership team that supports school self-evaluation and the identification of areas for improvement. Schools can use system data to benchmark their performance against other schools "in similar circumstances", setting targets and identifying actions for improvement.

3. System level: to provide "parents, taxpayers and the government information on the standards schools are achieving in return for the public money being invested in them"; and to identify what works well and where improvement is needed.

The Department of Education has also set specific requirements for schools to report this information to parents. The pupil's assessed Level of Progression in each of the cross-curricular skills in Years 4, 7 and 10 must be included in the annual report to parents. Schools must also include benchmarking information for parents on the percentage of pupils in the school: that has attained each LoP; that is at or above the expected Level; that has not yet attained the expected Level; and that is exempt from such assessment.

Moderation of teacher assessments of pupil progress against the LoP

The Department of Education has decided to implement a statutory moderation procedure to ensure the consistency of teacher assessments of pupil progress in cross-curricular skills against the LoP both within and across schools (see Chapter 6 for an overview). The introduction of a moderation procedure was supported by teacher representatives. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

manages and evaluates this procedure. From the school year 2012/13, the CCEA has implemented the moderation of teacher assessment of pupil progress in Communication and Using mathematics. This involves the CCEA verifying a sample of teacher assessments. Teachers/schools are required to compile individual pupil portfolios and to send these to the CCEA for selected pupils. Pupil portfolios are reviewed by moderators (teachers) recruited/appointed by the CCEA. Moderators verify that pupil portfolios are representative of the assessed level as judged by the pupil's teacher/school. Feedback is provided to each school to either validate that the teacher assessments meet central standards or to request that these are adjusted. The Department of Education reports that from 2013/14, some changes have been made to the moderation process in light of comments from teachers following their experiences in the first year of operation of the new arrangements.

Computer-based assessment (CBA)

At the time of the OECD review, primary schools were required to administer national computer-based assessments (CBA) to pupils in Years 4 to 7 for diagnostic purposes. These were introduced in 2012/13 and comprise two adaptive, computer-based tests to assess pupils' literacy and numeracy skills: Northern Ireland Literacy Assessment (NILA) and Northern Ireland Numeracy Assessment (NINA). These diagnostic tools are part of a wider strategy to improve pupil outcomes within Literacy and Numeracy as well as to close the performance gap between pupils from the least and most affluent backgrounds, which has been identified as a key area of concern in Northern Ireland (DENI, 2011; see also Chapter 1).The data from these assessments are not collected centrally. This decision strongly emphasises the formative nature of the tests. It is of note that an ongoing review of the computer-based assessments and related policy has resulted in a change of policy, and that these became voluntary in 2013/14.[2] Although schools may choose not to administer NILA and NINA, they are still expected to use diagnostic testing and to report on pupil progress to parents.

With the CBA, the intention is to provide teachers with reliable, formative tools to assess their pupils' progress and learning needs. The tests are intended for diagnostic purposes and the assessment data is primarily used for:

- Assessing pupil progress and identifying their learning needs
- Supporting self-evaluation and target-setting
- Helping teachers shape their teaching to address the learning needs of their pupils
- Providing information for parents on their children's strengths and weaknesses within literacy and numeracy

Schools in Northern Ireland have had access to central computer-based assessments since 2007/08. NILA and NINA are new tests that were introduced due to procurement obligations. The previous tests were called InCAS (Interactive Computerised Assessment System).

Summative assessment at Key Stage 4

At the end of compulsory education at age 16, pupils undertake a series of summative assessment with the aim of achieving academic qualifications: mainly the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs), but also other equivalent qualifications. Pupils take the GCSEs in the courses they have followed throughout Key Stage 4. Course

work and controlled (internal) assessment may contribute to a certain percentage of a pupil's final grade in the GCSEs. However, the majority of the grade is typically determined by pupils' performance in a final examination.

Although the Levels of Progression do not extend beyond Key Stage 3, schools are required to develop pupils' cross-curricular skills during Key Stage 4 and include an assessment of these in annual reports to parents.

Post-primary schools are obliged to report GCSE examination results at Key Stage 4 to the Department of Education (see Annex B, DENI 2013a).

Pupil performance on these qualifications is a key measure for system evaluation (Chapter 6) and feeds into school evaluation (Chapters 5). Aggregate results are reported for the proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent qualification) including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics. For pupils who completed compulsory education in 2011/12, 60.1% achieved at least 5 GCSEs (A*-C), including GCSEs in English and Mathematics (i.e. Level 2 qualifications). This was the same percentage as in 2010/11 (DENI, 2013).

The GCSEs are part of the National Qualifications Framework covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A GCSE at grade A*-C is a Level 2 qualification in the framework (this corresponds to the International Standard Classification of Education Systems [ISCED] level 3); whereas a GCSE at grade D-G is considered Level 1 qualification (ISCED 2).

Schools in Northern Ireland can register their pupils for GSCE examinations from any UK Examinations Board. The CCEA is the only examination board based in Northern Ireland that awards GCSE qualifications. Around 70% of the GCSE examinations taken by pupils in Northern Ireland are set by the CCEA. The rest are set by four other UK awarding bodies (DENI, 2013a).

Summative assessment in non-compulsory schooling (post 16 or Key Stage 5)

Pupils achieving Level 2 qualifications can choose to follow two extra years of non-compulsory schooling and study towards Level 3 qualifications: the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level ("A Level") or an equivalent qualification. At this level, students typically specialise in three or four subjects. Level 3 qualifications are recognised for entrance into higher education. In the same way as GCSE qualifications, A Level qualifications are part of the National Qualifications Framework and pupil success in these is used as a measure of success at the system level, and unofficially, of school success (see Chapters 5 and 6). In 2011/12, 64.8% of year 14 pupils achieved 3 or more A levels (including equivalents) at Grades A*-C; and 89.7% at Grades A*-E (DENI SAER, 2013b).

Other prevalent forms of student assessment

Use of commercial, standardised tests

Schools appear to rely heavily on commercial, standardised tests to monitor pupil progress. The tests are paid for by the schools themselves and may be used to make up for the lack of a more uniform system. Many primary schools use commercial tests to provide diagnostic assessment results and report that these are useful for formative purposes. The resulting assessment data is used both at pupil and school level. Post-primary schools also appear to use commercial tests to some extent, for example, to

create a reliable baseline when a new cohort of pupils enters the school. This baseline is subsequently used to track the progress of the pupils and thus evaluate the value added by the school.

Academic selection and unregulated transfer tests

Pupils transfer at the end of Year 7 (age 11) from primary to post-primary school. Official policy states that pupil transfer from primary to post-primary should not be based on academic criteria, and the last official selection test (known as "the 11+") was administered in 2008/09. However, the law does not prohibit post-primary schools from admitting pupils based on academic performance and there is a well-established group of academically selective schools, predominantly, grammar schools. According to information reported by school principals a year after the selection test was abolished (as part of the PISA 2009 survey), academic selection was still a well-established practice in the post-primary sector: 45% of students were in schools where students' academic record was always considered, compared to 30% on average in the OECD (Figure 3.1). In 2011/12, 42.1% of students entered for GCSE examinations were in grammar schools; for A level examinations in non-compulsory schooling this proportion was 62.5% (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Prevalence of academic selection in the post-primary sector

According to school principal reports in PISA 2009, student academic records are considered:

Percentage of pupils eligible for examinations in academically selective schools (2011/12)
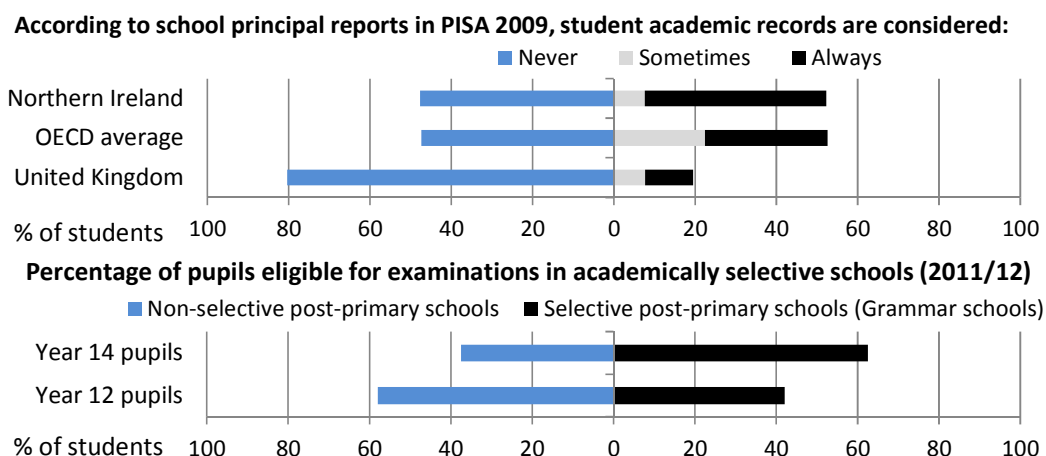
Sources:

OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful?: Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, PISA, OECD Publishing.
doi: 10.1787/9789264091559-en

DENI (2013b)*, Year 12 and Year 14 Examination Performance at Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland 2011-2012 (Revised),* Statistical Press Release 21 March 2013*,* DENI, Bangor, www.deni.gov.uk/year_12_and_year_14_examination_performance_at_post_primary_schools_in_northern_ireland_2011-12__revised_.pdf

Parents can choose for their children to sit unregulated entrance tests. In 2012/13, these were used by a total of 69 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, all but two of which were grammar schools[3]. There is an unregulated selection test system in place, known as "the transfer test", which is driven by two consortia: the Post primary Test Consortium (PPTC) and the Association for Quality Education (AQE). These consortia offer two commercial transfer tests used by two different groups of post-primary schools,

broadly split along the lines of Catholic and non-denominational schools. While both tests claim to be based on Key Stage 2 of the Revised Curriculum in Mathematics and English, they are different in structure, style and format.[4]

Strengths

Strong official focus on formative assessment and teachers' professional judgement

Formative assessment has been widely documented to have a strong positive impact on teaching and learning and, in some cases, has even been found to effectively reduce the gap between low- and high-achieving students (Black and William, 1998; Looney, 2011a). As a consequence, formative assessment practices have become an embedded part of the curriculum in many OECD countries (OECD, 2013).

The purpose of formative assessment is to: identify pupils' learning needs through different kinds of interactive assessment methods, provide feedback for pupils, and adapt and differentiate the subsequent teaching to effectively address identified learning needs (OECD, 2005). It also aims to actively engage the pupils in their own assessment and learning process through self- and peer-assessment (Sadler, 1989; Earl, 2003).

In Northern Ireland, formative assessment is at the core of the official assessment strategy that supports the revised curriculum. Key documents from the Department of Education, as well as information provided for various stakeholders, clearly emphasise the importance of assessment *for* learning. Official policy stresses that a principal aim of assessment in schools should be to inform teaching and learning by identifying when a pupil is not achieving the expected standards and taking action to support his/her further learning.

This is demonstrated, for example, within the key school improvement policy*: Every School a Good School* (ESaGS) (DENI, 2009). This document identifies effective formative assessment as an indicator of high quality teaching and learning at a school (p.15): "Assessment and other data is used to effectively inform teaching and learning across the school and in the classroom and to promote improvement". This is also evident from the Northern Ireland Curriculum document (Primary) (p.11): "Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. Through ongoing integrated assessment, teachers build a comprehensive picture of the progress and learning needs of each child in order to plan future work and ultimately improve learning". Overall, formative assessment appears to be an integrated part of the Northern Ireland curriculum: "The Northern Ireland Curriculum embraces the principles of Assessment for Learning by placing formative assessment at the heart of the learning and teaching cycle" (statement on the Northern Ireland Curriculum website).

The emphasis on teachers' professional judgement in assessing pupils against the Levels of Progression is highly consistent with a policy that aims to integrate formative assessment into teaching and learning. Moreover, the strong focus on teachers' professional judgement throughout the entire assessment system (also for summative purposes) is likely to strengthen the integration of formative assessment in the classroom, with the potential to enhance the validity of the judgements being made (Harlen, 2004, 2005).

Levels of Progression align to the curriculum and support the assessment of skills

Many OECD countries have reformed their education systems to focus more on the development of complex competencies rather than isolated knowledge and skills. Education systems are gradually introducing curricula that contain a number of key competencies that should be developed across subjects and year levels. EU member states have agreed upon a framework of eight "key competences" for life-long learning, comprising a mixture of essential knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to carry out tasks in real-life contexts (OECD, 2013, p. 147-148; European Commission, 2011).

The revised curriculum and the new Levels of Progression are consistent with European policy as it particularly focuses on the core cross-curricular skills of Communication (literacy); Using Mathematics (numeracy); and Using ICT. The Levels of Progression are designed to map the skills that pupils are expected to develop across subjects and year levels, and describe pupils' confidence and ability to apply these skills in a range of meaningful contexts. At the same time, they specify the standards pupils are expected to achieve by the end of certain stages in their education (Key Stages 1, 2 and 3).

In addition to being congruent with EU policy for life-long learning and recommendations for key competencies, the Levels of Progression have strong potential to serve as a reference for teachers to ensure that teaching supports the pupils in achieving a common set of standards. The LoP can serve as a reference for both formative and summative assessment of student performance and contribute to a higher degree of consistency in teachers' judgement within and across schools. As reported by Darling-Hammond and McCloskey (2008, p. 264), "higher-achieving countries […] have a more thoughtful sequence of expectations based on developmental learning progressions within and across domains." (Cited in Nusche et al., 2012, p.46).

By explicitly focusing on what pupils can do at certain stages in their education, the LoP can potentially provide a strong framework for the ongoing, formative assessment of pupil progress, and can facilitate active pupil engagement in their own learning process. For summative purposes, the LoP can potentially provide clear expectations for student achievement at the end of the Key Stages.

Although there may be concerns regarding how meaningful the LoP will be for formative assessment (see below), the rationale behind their development and implementation is sound and congruent with European practice.

Official policy aims to build on and strengthen levels of assessment literacy among teachers

Assessment literacy involves awareness of the different factors that may impact the validity and reliability of assessment results and the ability to interpret data, identify actions for improvement and monitor student progress (Looney, 2011a, p. 25). While there is national evidence that further improvements are required in monitoring pupil progress in several schools evaluated, in particular in relation to the assessment of students with special educational needs, there is also evidence of a solid foundation of teacher assessment practices in the majority of schools. For example, around 76% of the lessons observed in post-primary schools during 2010-2012 were evaluated as good or better and 39% as very good or outstanding, with teachers assessing pupil learning needs and modifying their lessons accordingly (ETI, 2012, pp56). The OECD review team

gained the impression that teachers generally have strong knowledge of different assessment processes and purposes, and their advantages and pitfalls. Although the few schools visited during the OECD review cannot be representative of the system, there were clear and coherent indicators of a strong assessment culture observed in all schools visited. For example, teachers were able to clearly present the local school assessment policy and to elaborate on the nature and purpose of individual assessment methods, and critically reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of different methods. In addition, the OECD review team heard reports from teachers and students on the use of a mix of formative assessment methods (*e.g.*, the use of student portfolios, systematic observations in the classroom, individual and group tasks) indicating an embedded culture for continuous assessment of student progress.

It is expected that the strong focus on teacher-based assessment in the curriculum will contribute to further strengthening the assessment literacy of teachers. As pointed out by Looney (2011a, p. 24): "Stronger assessment roles for teachers may also help to build their assessment literacy and skills, ensure closer links between assessment and instruction, and strengthen their professionalism". The moderation process (see below) for the Levels of Progression may similarly contribute to enhancing the assessment literacy of teachers. The OECD review team noted that the provision of an assessment programme within the electronic portal (Classroom 2000 [C2k]) available to all schools can facilitate the monitoring of student learning progress (see below).

The curriculum and school evaluation policy promote student engagement in self- and peer-assessment

A key aim of formative assessment is to engage students in their own learning process through self- and peer-assessment (Sadler, 1989). Students who are encouraged to evaluate their learning progress against set criteria, determine individual learning goals and reflect upon the process are likely to develop higher-order skills such, as metacognitive awareness and skills for "learning to learn". This is sometimes referred to as "assessment *as* learning" (Earl, 2003).

In the schools visited by the OECD review team, pupil reports indicated a high level of engagement in self- and peer- assessment and a strong awareness of the assessment system. Teachers involve students in setting targets for their learning and encourage them to monitor and take responsibility for their own learning process and progress. While it is impossible to generalise this to the system level as it may only reflect practice at the leading edge, it was clear to the OECD review team that the revised curriculum, and in particular its focus on cross-curricular skills, had been a catalyst for pupils engaging in self- and peer-assessment. The list below provides examples of cross-curricular skills that can promote pupil engagement in evaluating, reflecting upon, and discussing their own and their peer's learning progress. Pupils should be enabled to (Annex C, DENI, 2013a):

- talk about, plan and edit work (Writing);
- contribute comments, ask questions and respond to others' points of view (Talking and Listening);
- use mathematical understanding and language to ask and answer questions, talk about and discuss ideas and explain ways of working (Using Mathematics);
- share, collaborate, exchange and develop ideas digitally (Exchange);

- talk about, review and make improvements to work, reflecting on the process and outcome (Evaluate);

- manage and present their stored work (Exhibit).

Apart from a high degree of collaborative work in the classroom, the focus on such skills can foster student autonomy, meta-cognitive awareness and self-regulation skills (Earl, 2003).

In addition, pupils' self- and peer-assessment also receives focus within external school evaluation. In the *Together Towards Improvement* series of supporting tools for school self-evaluation, the ETI specifies the following two quality indicators: *(i)* teachers use an appropriately wide range of assessment for learning strategies, including, self and peer-assessment, and formative use of summative assessment outcomes; *(ii)* pupils are involved in helping to identify personal learning targets (at the primary level) or pupils individually identify personal learning targets (at the post-primary level) (ETI, 2010a, p. 23; ETI, 2010b, p. 23).

Strong communication with parents and reporting on student progress

Parents are key partners in their children's education and learning processes. It is therefore important to promote a strong collaboration between school and home and encourage parents to support their children's education by providing them with information about their children's learning goals, progress and achievement in relation to expected standards. This will enable parents to focus their resources on helping the children achieve their targets – at home and in school (OECD, 2013; Guskey and Marzano, 2001). Timely and adequate reporting and communication of assessment results should serve such a purpose.

In Northern Ireland regular reporting to parents on their children's progress is a statutory requirement. Teachers are required to provide an annual report to parents on their children's progress in Years 1 to 14. An additional requirement in Years 4 to 7 is for teachers to provide written feedback on pupil performance in the computer-based assessments and meet with parents. For this purpose the CBAs include a reporting function for communication of results to parents. Although in 2012/13 educators raised concerns about the content of the reports generated by the CBAs.

Overall, the OECD team's discussions with parents during the review confirmed that there is a strong framework for providing parental feedback on pupil progress in Northern Ireland.

Evidence from the PISA 2009 survey indicates a well-established culture of reporting to parents on student progress at the post-primary level, however, this is mainly relative to student performance within the school and not against a national benchmark of expected student performance level (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Reporting to parents in post-primary schools
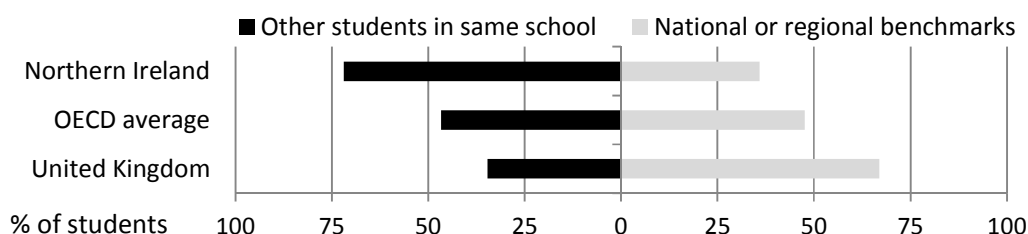
Note: Percentage of 15 year olds in schools whose principal reported that the school gives information to parents on student performance relative to either other students in the same school or national or regional benchmarks (PISA 2009).

Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful?: Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091559-en (Tables S.IV.i and IV.3.14)

The policy to provide primary schools with a central diagnostic tool aligned to the curriculum

The OECD review team commends the introduction of a centrally developed, computer-based assessment tool that is used for diagnostic purposes. It fits well with an official assessment strategy that focuses on assessment *for* learning and a wider national strategy to reduce inequity in student outcomes. Formative methods, such as diagnostic assessment, have been found to effectively reduce the gap between low- and high-achieving students (Black and William, 1998; Looney, 2011a). Also, the introduction of the CBAs is consistent with the national strategy to improve pupil performance within literacy and numeracy.

In addition to this, the main benefits of the CBAs are:

- They can potentially provide a reliable basis for assessing student progress and learning needs and can thus serve as an important tool for teachers when planning teaching to meet learner needs.

- The assessment data can potentially be used to support self-assessment and individualised target setting.

- They are standardised to Northern Ireland's school population and aligned with the revised curriculum.

- They can potentially reduce the workload of teachers as no marking is involved.

- They are adaptive. This means that the difficulty of the questions adapts to the level of the pupil, reducing the risk of demotivation. It also means that they can potentially provide a nuanced, fine-grained profile of the pupil's performance.

- They can potentially provide teachers with a clear and reliable basis for providing information for parents on their children's strengths and weaknesses within numeracy and literacy.

The OECD review team supports the decision not to centrally collect or collate the assessment data from the CBAs. This decision strongly emphasises the formative purpose of the tests.

The general approach to include a pilot phase before introducing the new CBAs

The OECD review team supports the overall approach taken by the CCEA with regard to piloting the CBAs and seeking feedback from schools, teachers and parents on their implementation.

Prior to implementation, the CCEA conducted a number of trials and quality assurance checks to evaluate the quality and functionality of the assessments. After each stage a number of main improvements were identified and the outcome of each stage in the piloting phase was used to inform the next one.

Initially, beta versions of the assessments were piloted in a pre-trial (January 2012), which included a small number of primary schools. The main purpose of the pre-trial was to pilot how the assessment worked on the C2k platform as well as to evaluate content and functionality of the assessments. Building on the information obtained from the pre-trial, the CCEA conducted a main trial (March 2012) with a representative sample of primary schools (185 for NILA and 193 for NINA). The purpose of this was to evaluate elements such as assessment content, pupil engagement and compatibility with the C2k platform. Moreover, the objective was to evaluate the test items and the adaptive nature of the assessments. Teachers and pupils who participated in the pilot were asked to provide feedback on the assessments through a questionnaire. In May 2012 the CCEA also conducted quality assurance checks of the assessments with 50 primary schools. The main aims of these checks were to evaluate the quality of previously identified improvements, to trial the administration process and to obtain feedback on the assessment reports provided for teachers.[5]

At the time of the OECD review there was also an ongoing review of the CBAs, including opportunities for school principals, teachers and parents to provide feedback via questionnaires on the Northern Ireland Curriculum website.

Although the OECD review team supports the general approach of having a pilot phase before implementation, there are several concerns regarding the rigour of this pilot, in particular with regard to the incorporation of feedback from stakeholders (see below).

Support for a moderation procedure to build trust in teacher professional judgements

The assessment of pupils' cross-curricular skills against the LoP is based entirely on the teachers' professional judgement. The purpose of the statutory moderation is to enhance the reliability of the teacher-based assessments, strengthen teacher confidence in their judgements against the LoP, and promote trust among schools in the standards being applied for student learning.

The CCEA conducted a pilot of the new moderation process, which the OECD review team sees as a sound approach. The "Shadow Year" trial aimed to ensure that the new assessment arrangements, in particular the moderation procedures, were fit for purpose, manageable and would build confidence throughout the school system. The pilot resulted in a number of recommendations for the implementation of the new assessment arrangements at a policy, support and operational level (CCEA, 2012). In particular, it resulted in agreement from primary and post-primary schools that random quality assurance measures should be adopted to ensure trust in the teacher-based assessments. However, the OECD review revealed a sense of frustration among participating schools that their critical feedback had not been fully considered (see below).

3. STUDENT ASSESSMENT – **63**

Although informal moderation may take place internally at the schools, it seems highly beneficial to implement systematic external moderation procedures. Given the reported perceptions that teacher assessments were unreliable at the primary level (see below), introducing a robust moderation procedure that aims to build confidence in teachers' assessment capacity is extremely pertinent. The proposed secondary use of end of key stage assessment data for system level accountability is another argument to strengthen the reliability of teacher assessments. This is in line with other countries such as Belgium, France, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand, which have all implemented systematic arrangements for moderation in cases where assessment data are used for accountability (OECD, 2013, p. 183).

Availability and in many cases effective use of information systems to track student learning progress

Using assessment data to inform teaching and learning and promote improvement at pupil and school level is at the heart of the school improvement policy in Northern Ireland. It is clearly stated in *Every School a Good School* that school improvement builds on the capacity to effectively use assessment data to monitor the performance and progression of pupils and classes (DENI, 2009, p. 26). This is similarly reflected in *Count, Read: Succeed* in which it is stressed that "school leaders should also embed a culture where monitoring and analysing pupil progress data is an integral part of their accountability processes" (DENI, 2011, p. 26).

The OECD review team formed the impression that many schools in Northern Ireland have an embedded culture of using information systems to monitor the pupils' learning progress, thus enabling effective use of assessment data. All primary and post-primary schools have access to the School Information Management System (SIMS) Assessment Manager software and can use this to record information on student performance. SIMS gives access to a wide range of data and tools and enables schools to fulfil their statutory reporting obligations, such as the requirement to report the outcomes of student achievement in literacy and numeracy at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. There is evidence that where schools are making good use of these tools, student learning is improving. The ETI identifies the good use of data in self-evaluation activities as key to improvements in primary schools (ETI, 2012). The Northern Ireland Audit Office highlighted the individual targeting of students and good use of data as common factors in twenty schools that had been identified for having comparatively strong numeracy and literacy outcomes (NIAO, 2013).

The schools visited by the OECD review team confirmed that the SIMS assessment suite is a useful tool to monitor pupil progress, to plan interventions, where necessary, and to review the effectiveness of those interventions. However, the review team also suggests considering whether this could be more effectively used to monitor student progress at the individual level.

Challenges

All of the challenges noted in this section relate to the dynamic of changing from a traditionally test-driven assessment culture with low trust in teachers' professional judgement to one that is better aligned to the Northern Ireland knowledge and skills based curriculum and places teacher professional judgement at its centre. While there may be broad support among stakeholders for the key elements of the new student assessment

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approaches, there are several implementation concerns that need to be addressed to ensure that this cultural shift in assessment is successful.

Tensions surrounding the dual purpose of teacher assessments against the Levels of Progression at end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3

The teacher-based assessments of pupils' cross-curricular skills against the Levels of Progression serve two main purposes.

First, they aim to document student learning progress and inform teaching and learning in the classroom. The ongoing assessment against the criteria in the LoP is intended to assist the teacher in identifying pupils' learning needs and adjusting teaching accordingly. Once a year, the teachers are expected to use these criteria to report pupil progress to parents (a summative assessment).

Second, they provide information for school system evaluation. In Northern Ireland, there is a political requirement to collect information on pupil learning outcomes during their compulsory schooling. Consequently, a subset of teacher assessments (assessments of pupils' cross-curricular skills) is also used as a measure of school system performance. At the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (*i.e.* on three occasions in a child's 12 years of compulsory schooling) student outcomes in literacy and numeracy are reported to the Department of Education and used as a performance indicator at system level. The results are thus collected centrally and made publicly available. The intention is that the initial reporting of literacy and numeracy outcomes will eventually be complemented by the reporting of pupil outcomes in Using ICT.

The OECD review team learned that the previous policy of collecting information from schools without the moderation of teacher assessments had generated widespread distrust among teachers and schools regarding the reliability of results. These concerns were noted in designing the new arrangements (CCEA, 2011). Gallagher (2012) provides data showing a 9.3% increase in the non-moderated Level 5 judgement in primary schools between 2001 and 2009 and suggests that this is linked to the use of such results for school accountability. During the OECD review, different stakeholders expressed concern that the proposed collection of information on pupil outcomes for school system accountability would compromise the reliability of teachers' judgements within and between schools. Such concerns are unsurprising at such an early stage of implementing the new moderation procedures, and with the identified need to build confidence in these procedures (see below). Once the new moderation procedures bed in, they will, by design, strengthen the reliability of teacher assessments and comparability of results throughout the school system. However, concerns persist at this stage and primarily relate to competition among schools to attract pupils. The fears are that such competition will be an incentive for schools to inflate ratings and place pupils in the expected levels (Level 2 at KS 1; Level 4 at KS 2; Level 5 at KS 3) although they may not have reached these levels.

Research sounds a note of caution that such perceived tensions may undermine both the formative and summative value of the assessment results. Linn (2000) points out that assessment frameworks used for formative purposes may lose their credibility, and thus their positive effect on teaching and learning, if high stakes for students, teachers or schools are attached to them. Largely based on experience in the United States, Looney (2011a) argues that high stakes can lead to inflation of scores as teachers are likely to "teach to the test" to avoid sanctions.

Teachers have reservations about the implementation of assessment against Levels of Progression (LoP)

The OECD review team noted some concerns around the implementation of teacher assessment against the Levels of Progression. Teacher representatives reported that early experiences with the new LoP have raised questions on how meaningful these will be for formative purposes. By design, the levels are broad: seven levels cover ten years of education, which means that individual levels represent up to two years of learning progression. This supports the criticism that the "jumps" in progression are too large to be used effectively for formative assessment. The OECD review team also noted related concerns that the descriptors for specific levels are not clear or detailed enough to ensure a valid assessment of pupils' progression and performance. In turn, a lack of more detailed criteria also limits the use of the LoP to guide subsequent teaching and learning. Depending on how widespread such concerns are, this could pose a challenge to the effective implementation of the LoP, but may also identify a need to revisit the nature of the LoP. OECD reviews from other countries indicate that if assessment criteria are not clearly formulated, teachers tend to use their own experienced-based reference points instead of the set standards (OECD, 2013).

Further, at this early stage of implementation, the OECD review team gained the impression that there is room to further develop supporting tools to help teachers in Northern Ireland to assess pupil progress against the LoP. There appears to be demand to further extend the provision of sample tasks developed by the CCEA, as teachers are not yet confident in developing their own assessment tasks to support assessment against the LoP. Research evidence clearly indicates that detailed scoring guides and rich examples of pupil performance at different levels are needed to enhance the reliability of teacher-based assessments (Harlen, 2004; 2005).

Finally, the OECD review team noted different perspectives regarding the development, trial and implementation of the LoP. The collaboration between the CCEA and teacher representatives, although fruitful, appears to have met some challenges. Any negative perceptions from this process would also have placed tension on the further implementation of the LoP.

An urgent need to build teachers' trust in the new moderation system for end of key stage assessments

The idea of implementing a systematic moderation process is fundamentally good and is broadly supported. As noted above, the OECD review team sees this as a pertinent step in implementing robust and valid assessment aligned to the curriculum. However, there is an urgent need to build teachers' trust that the system will enhance the reliability of teacher judgements. If teachers and schools have no confidence in the process and do not take ownership of it, it is unlikely to bring about the expected benefits.

The legacy of the previous system of assessment against "levels of attainment", with only a voluntary moderation process, is a widespread distrust in the reliability of teacher assessments. There is an established view that the teacher assessments for end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 vary significantly within and among schools. This is evident from the findings of the CCEA *Research Report on the Proposed Assessment and Moderation Arrangements* (2011) and it was strongly backed up by interviews during the OECD review. The previous moderation process was conducted on a voluntary basis and seemed highly inadequate. Moderation at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 has not been statutory

since 2006, meaning that some primary schools may not have been moderated for up to 8 years. Further, outcomes at end of Key Stage 3 have never been moderated. As a consequence, there is likely to be little experience in the schools of implementing quality assurance of teacher-based assessments.

During the OECD review, many stakeholders expressed reservations about the new moderation process. Broadly, these fell into two categories:

- *Under confidence that this will adequately address reliability concerns*. Some stakeholders felt that the focus of the moderation was unclear as to whether it pertains to the standards being applied by individual teachers or by schools. Some stakeholders also expressed the view that the moderation procedures will not add value. Although the teachers may develop their ability to apply the criteria consistently, they will still be under pressure to inflate their ratings and place pupils in the expected levels (e.g. Level 4 at Key Stage 2). This pertains to the underlying tension caused by school competition (see above). As a result, many educators express preference for a standardised test.

- *Concerns that this will be a cumbersome bureaucratic process detracting from teaching time*. During the OECD review teachers also reported the perception that the new moderation process is time consuming and labour intensive as teachers have to assemble information for selected students. A number of teaching unions have raised similar concerns about the new moderation arrangements, leading to industrial action over the perceived work load involved in the procedures.

Indications that there may be an overreliance on commercial testing

The use of systems to monitor pupil progress as part of school self-evaluation activities is highly valued in the current approach to external school evaluation, and has been identified as a factor in observed school improvement (see Chapters 1 and 5). As noted above, all publicly funded schools have access to the School Information Management System Assessment Manager and use this to record information on student performance. This supports and promotes a data literate assessment culture in schools. School principal reports from PISA 2009 indicate that the reported usage of standardised tests in Northern Ireland's post-primary schools is around the OECD average (Figure 3.3). Although the usage of teachers' judgemental ratings is well established, they are a less frequently used form of student assessment than on average in the OECD (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Reported usage of standardised tests in post-primary schools
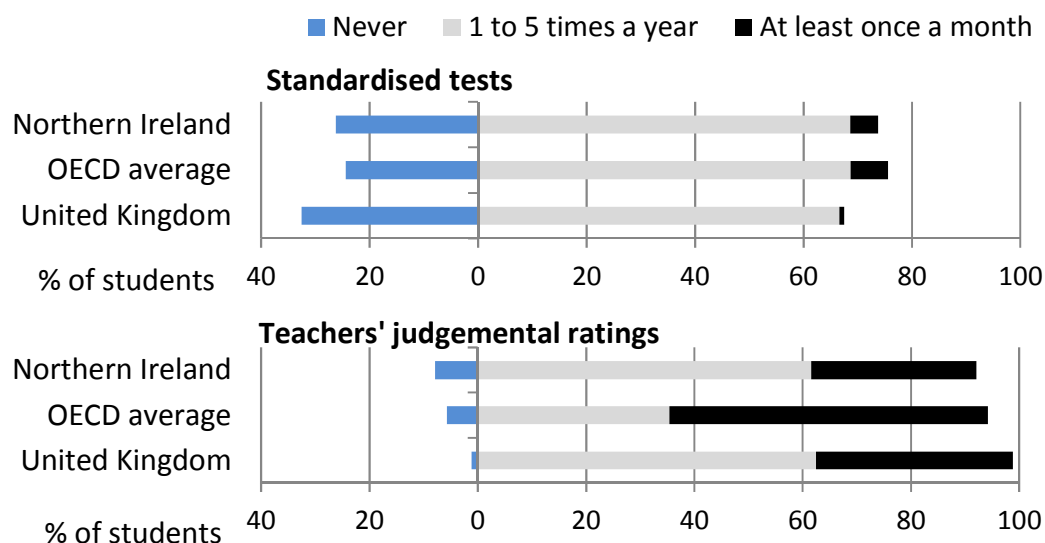
Note: Percentage of 15 year olds in schools whose principal reported this assessment practice (PISA 2009).

Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful?: Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091559-en (Tables S.IV.g and IV.3.10)

In Northern Ireland, schools use, in some cases heavily, commercial standardised tests to monitor student progress. Teacher unions provided information on the plethora of tests and assessment systems in use in schools, showing that the lion's share is outside the official student assessment framework. There is a heightened risk that pupils' schooling experience is dominated by commercial testing towards the end of primary schooling, with the unregulated transfer tests (see below). The main advantage of commercial, standardised tests is their potential to offer a high degree of reliability: pupils are given the same tasks and are scored consistently according to the same criteria. However, commercial tests may have a lower degree of validity as it is by no means guaranteed that they are sufficiently aligned with the knowledge and skills-based curriculum in Northern Ireland. To the extent that teachers and/or schools heavily direct their teaching towards the content of the commercial tests, there is a potential that this disproportionately impacts the implemented curriculum. Consequently, commercial tests will be driving the focus of what is taught in schools and not the curriculum. Indeed, one of the aims of NILA and NINA is to meet the need for diagnostic testing at the primary level and to provide a reliable and valid tool aligned to the curriculum (see above).

These observations suggest that the new assessment approach to put teacher professional judgement at the centre of student assessment, notably at the primary level, requires a significant cultural shift. Up until 2008/09, there was an official test administered at the end of primary schooling to aid the selection of the most academically able students into the selective school sector. This history and continued expectation in many parts of society (see below) is one dynamic fuelling the perception that teachers' judgements are not as reliable as a test. Many schools feel obliged to rely on commercial, standardised tests to compensate for their lack of confidence in teacher professional judgements. This may also have been exacerbated by inadequate moderation procedures in the former "levels of attainment" assessment system. It seems that lack of detailed

criteria, or the inability of teachers to apply these criteria consistently, lead to an overreliance on commercial tests and potentially a narrowing of the curriculum (Stecher et al., 2000). In comparison, teacher-based assessments can potentially have a high degree of validity as teachers are able to obtain an in-depth picture of pupil performance through their daily observations in the classroom (Harlen, 2007). However, a prerequisite for this is that they are provided with enough support and guidance to enable them to use the criteria accurately and consistently, thus enhancing the reliability of their judgements.

Technical challenges and implementation concerns with the official computer-based assessments

The purpose of the statutory computer-based assessments (CBA) is to give all primary schools (Year 4-7) a consistent, formative tool for assessing and monitoring pupil progress within numeracy and literacy. It is expected that the assessments will reduce the need for schools to administer commercially provided tests. However, during the OECD review, which was the first year of full implementation of NILA and NINA, the team noted a widespread distrust in the reliability and value of the new tests. The OECD review team learned of a series of reported technical problems with the test in the first year, including screens freezing, sound problems and educator reports that the tests demanded too high a level of physical dexterity from pupils in manipulating the keyboard and mouse. Due to such frustrating initial experiences with NILA and NINA, many schools formed the opinion that they already had more reliable and efficient testing procedures in place. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, these technical challenges and implementation concerns were documented in an official evaluation of NILA and NINA.[6] However, the OECD review team notes some important concerns below.

Concerns related to the feedback of results

During the OECD review, some educators raised a specific concern about the adaptive nature of the tests, namely, that pupils would not have the opportunity to answer all questions that they may be able to successfully complete. By extension, educators feared that pupils would not be able to demonstrate their full ability. The OECD review team notes that such a concern goes against the basic aim of adaptive tests, which is to allow pupils to demonstrate what they can do. In a conventional test pupils may be confronted with a series of questions that they are unable to answer. The OECD review team has no technical evidence on the adaptive algorithm of the tests, but it would be important to defend and demonstrate this fundamental point. An OECD review in Denmark revealed that there can be important misconceptions surrounding the nature of adaptive testing (Shewbridge, et al. 2011).

During the OECD review, stakeholders raised concerns on the feedback of results in the first year of the test related to both initial implementation and the nature of feedback. Given the decision to standardise the outcomes against the entire cohort, there was a long delay in delivering the standardised scores, which made it difficult to provide accurate and timely feedback to pupils and use the scores for immediate formative purposes. Teachers also raised concerns that the assessment reports generated for parents as part of NILA and NINA are too generic and of limited use. In 2012/13, these were effectively a list of "can do" statements which are difficult to communicate to parents in a clear manner. There is, for example, a concern that two reports for very different performance profiles on the test may contain similar statements. This makes it difficult for parents to judge how well their child performs compared to others or to the expected level.

Lack of continuity in official assessment tools

Over and above the technical implementation issues, the OECD review team notes an additional challenge in the lack of continuity in official assessment tools. Due to the requirement to periodically tender public sector contracts, NILA and NINA were developed, replacing the previous official computer-based assessments (InCAS). During the OECD review, stakeholders reported that the InCAS had just become integrated into daily practice in primary schools and that the change from InCAS to NINA and NILA had caused significant confusion and frustration. In addition, the change of provider made it difficult to compare pupils' scores from one year to another, undermining the value of the tools in supporting school self-evaluation activities. Another point raised during the OECD review was how the new tests had created unnecessary confusion for pupils, due to the fact that two different companies had developed the tests, resulting in different layout and interface for each test.

Concerns regarding pilot and implementation phase

During the OECD review, interviews with stakeholders revealed different perspectives on the adequacy and effectiveness of the pilot process. Although the process of having a pre-trial (January 2012), a main trial (March 2012) and quality assurance process (May 2012) appears to be sound, it seems unrealistic to pilot and implement an important assessment tool, like the CBA, within such a short time-span. Normally, piloting and validation would be a more rigourous and long-term process of collecting multiple sources of information and building an evidence-based case for test use (Messick, 1989; Bachman, 2005). Furthermore, there only seems to be very few recommendations for changes and actions resulting from the trials.[7] This is not at all consistent with the long list of concerns raised during the OECD review.

Based on this there is a strong need to conduct a thorough validation of the tests and restore the credibility of the assessment tools (see policy options below).

Concerns regarding unregulated transfer tests for academic selection

Across the OECD, the existence of central examinations in primary schooling is very rare. The OECD defines "examinations" as tests that impact on a student's eligibility to progress to the next level and/or part of a process to certify learning. Only Portugal and Belgium (French Community) have such examinations at the primary level (Table 4.A2.4a, OECD, 2013). There are no central examinations in Northern Ireland at the primary level, as the official transfer test was abolished in 2008/09. Back in 2008 a public consultation on the draft literacy and numeracy strategy sought feedback on academic selection. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with "no academic selection at post primary". Unfortunately, only 213 respondents participated in the consultation, but they indicated a clear division of opinion on academic selection.[8]

At the time of the OECD review, the educational reality is that academic selection continues to exist at the end of primary schooling, but without an official objective measure. In 2012/13, 43% of pupils were enrolled in selective post-primary schools due to a demographic drop (see Chapter 1). In 2012/13, 69 post-primary schools ran unregulated transfer tests. Therefore, the unregulated transfer tests have significant influence in Northern Ireland's school system. Primary schools report pressure from parents to ignore official policy and spend teaching time on preparing their pupils for the unregulated transfer tests. This is an example of commercial tests driving and possibly distorting the curriculum. There is no regulation of the content of the transfer tests and no

guarantee that these are adequately aligned with Northern Ireland's knowledge and skills based curriculum. The OECD review team notes marked differences in the claimed test specifications on the websites of the two consortia. Elwood (2011, in Gallagher, 2012) finds these selection tests to be of dubious validity, reliability or comparability.

The OECD review team learned that there is a significant proportion of parents for whom the unregulated transfer tests hold prestige, due to the fact that they are used as entrance requirements to many post-primary schools. Although many parents may support official policy that opposes academic selection, they find themselves in a double-bind as many of the post-primary schools with an established reputation for academic rigour may only or mainly respect these unregulated tests as entrance requirements. In such cases, parents may arrange for their child to sit the unregulated tests, which may even involve pupils sitting both sets as different schools respect the results of different tests and sitting both tests keeps more options open for the pupil. Clearly, this is a situation in which the individual child is losing out. There is a pressure to perform well on these tests and children are spending up to four weekends in unfamiliar environments to take these tests. This point is made in the ETI's most recent summative report on schooling: "The transfer process for children moving to post-primary education remains unsettling for the children, their parents and schools; it is a matter of concern that this has been the case for some considerable time" (p.14, ETI, 2012). These facts and anecdotal evidence indicate a severe undermining of the official policy.

Department of Education policy is undermined in other ways, the OECD review team learned. For example, many parents are less interested in their child's results at end of key stage assessments, but respect the unregulated transfer tests. There are also indications that the overarching policy objective for the Department of Education to increase equity is compromised with this unregulated transfer system. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the unofficial test system is creating social imbalance as some parents are better able to support and prepare their children for these tests, for example through private tutoring, which appears to be a widespread practice. There is a fee to sit one of the two unregulated tests, although the OECD review team learned that participating schools operate a policy of exemption for pupils entitled to free school meals.

Transition of student assessment information from primary to post-primary schools

The OECD review team learnt that the rich assessment data generated for each individual pupil at the primary level is largely being ignored by post-primary schools. As noted, there is a culture of distrust in the reliability of the assessment data provided by primary schools, partly as a consequence of the moderation procedures at primary level being voluntary for many years. During the OECD review, discussions at both primary and post-primary schools revealed that educators report great variation in the teacher assessments previously provided at the end of primary school education. Stakeholders emphasised that this was not due to a lack of professionalism of teachers at the primary level. Yet, even with this established viewpoint that the previous assessments at the primary level were not reliable, there has been no culture of feedback from post-primary schools to primary schools on the teacher assessments of pupil ability. When post-primaries note systematic differences from year to year among their feeder schools, this would appear to be a wasted opportunity to inform improved assessment procedures at the primary level. As such, most post-primary schools administer a diagnostic test when pupils enter their school in order to assess individual ability and to provide a baseline to measure progress for the individual pupil and cohort throughout the post-primary school

career. This is clearly expressed in the *Research Report on the Proposed Assessment and Moderation Arrangements for the Northern Ireland Curriculum* (2011) where the following is concluded for the stakeholder group comprising principals from post-primary schools (p. 51):

> Principals unanimously agreed that they had no confidence in the reliability of assessment outcomes from the primary sector. Principals strongly perceived the primary sector's assessments to be over "inflated" and noted a "clear discrepancy" with their assessment judgements, particularly regarding Level 4 and 5 outcomes. Principals indicated that their lack of confidence with assessment outcomes from the primary sector has led them to develop their own systems of benchmarking pupils upon their transfer to Year 8. (CCEA, 2011)

The OECD review team perceived that post-primary schools would demand more detailed assessment of pupils assessed as "Level 4" within the LoP system. This is the desired level at the end of Key Stage 2, and in practice, large proportions of pupils would be expected to achieve this level. Indeed, the aim would be for *all* pupils to achieve this level. By extension, the broad category "Level 4" may include a wide range of abilities. As such, the LoP assessment procedures, although providing more reliable results, are unlikely to address sufficiently the information needs of post-primary schools.

A need to ensure the validity of student summative assessment at Key Stage 4

At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils complete a number of GCSEs or equivalent qualifications via different forms of summative assessment. The OECD review team is concerned about the alignment between the GCSEs and the skills-based curriculum in Northern Ireland. There appears to be a disconnect between pupil learning up until the end of Key Stage 3, and pupil preparation for summative assessment at the end of Key Stage 4. From Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3, teaching, learning and assessment are based on the objectives formulated for the six areas of learning, and for the cross-curricular skills described in the LoP, with a strong focus on developing a wide range of student skills. While there are also statutory requirements regarding the curriculum at Key Stage 4, pupil learning outcomes and objectives appear to be mainly driven by subject criteria for the GCSE examinations offered by different awarding organisations, and seem to be more focussed on preparing the students for a good result in the GCSEs. Hence, the teaching will be governed by what is required to pass the GCSE examinations and can potentially narrow or even undermine the strong skills-focus of the revised curriculum. During the OECD review, some concerns were raised that there is too much focus on preparing pupils for success in GCSEs with an emphasis on particular test or assessment scoring requirements and less focus on broader learning. Such concerns have been echoed by the Education and Training Inspectorate. Among the post-primary schools inspected in the 2010-2012 period, the ETI noted insufficient continuity and progression of skills development from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, "especially where there is too narrow a focus on subject content for examination requirements rather than on effective learning and teaching" (p. 60, ETI, 2012). In its general report on schooling in the United Kingdom, the CBI (2012, p.9) notes that the examination system drives behaviour in later stages of secondary education and underlines the importance that this is aligned to the goals that society expects schools to achieve.

The strong focus on pupil preparation for summative assessment at the end of Key Stage 4 is bolstered by the fact that Year 12 pupil performance on the GCSE qualifications is also used a measure of school success. Aggregate school results are

reported for the proportion of Year 12 pupils achieving at least five GCSEs or equivalent, including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics. There are targets set at the system level for all schools in Northern Ireland to achieve, with a view to raising standards across schools. However, there is no official measure of value added to factor in the starting point of pupils in any given school. Therefore, a simple measure of final GCSE results is perceived by many schools and educators as an unfair comparative measure.

Policy options

A coherent framework for student assessment involves that *(ii)* the framework is based on a well-conceptualised foundation in terms of the curriculum, standards and learning progressions; *(ii)* the purposes of the different types of assessment are balanced and clearly formulated; and *(iii)* the roles and responsibilities for implementing the assessment framework are clearly defined (OECD, 2013, p. 214).

The previous sections have outlined some of the main strengths and challenges of the framework for student assessment in Northern Ireland. The challenges highlight a number of underlying tensions which may be creating an imbalance in the system and compromising the coherence of the student assessment framework in a number of ways. This section suggests the following options for policy makers in order to address these tensions:

- Address the tensions derived from the dual purpose of teachers' assessments against the LoP.

- Actively engage educators in refining the LoP and end of key stage assessments.

- Validate the central diagnostic tools and ensure they respond to educators' needs.

- Facilitate and promote the exchange of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools.

- Recognise that the unregulated transfer test system is penalising pupils.

- Provide guidance to schools on how well major commercial tests match the curriculum.

Address the tensions derived from the dual purpose of teachers' assessments against the LoP

In a coherent assessment framework, it is important to strike a balance between formative and summative assessment and ensure that every assessment instrument being used is fit for its intended purpose. In view of this, it is essential to clearly specify the purpose for the assessments and clearly communicate these to educators.

Newton (2007) argues that it is possible for an assessment to have multiple purposes as long as they are not logically incompatible. If one assessment is used for more purposes, it is crucial to explicitly specify and communicate what the *primary* purpose of the assessment is. A validation of the assessment should then be carried out with regard to this primary purpose intended for the assessment results. However, other researchers argue that the more purposes an assessment is intended to serve, the more each purpose will be undermined by compromises made during the design process (Pellegrino et al, 2001). For instance, an assessment that is primarily designed for diagnostic and formative

purposes should not be used for summative or accountability purposes as this would likely compromise its primary purpose (Linn, 2000).

With the assessment of pupils in literacy and numeracy at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, there is a need to clearly communicate the rationale behind the dual purpose of the teacher-based assessments against the LoP. This would involve identifying what the *primary* purpose of the assessment is and laying out the advantages and disadvantages of this option and of the alternative options. This would contribute to a greater transparency in the system and may lead to a higher degree of teacher support and commitment. The OECD review team would strongly recommend that the primary purpose is for student assessment and that the use of data as measures in system accountability is secondary (see also Chapter 6). The moderation procedure should aim to improve the reliability of summative assessment for individual pupils. In turn, the involvement of teachers in moderating these assessments is expected to develop their assessment capacity in theses core areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum. The internal moderation procedure at the school level offers a platform for focused professional discussion that is also expected to positively influence teachers' regular and formative assessment of pupils in these areas. The OECD review team supports the aim of such policy to promote more valid assessment against Northern Ireland's knowledge and skills-based curriculum.

An effective moderation procedure should provide reliable information to evaluate the school system. In Northern Ireland, there is a clear commitment to accountability and a use of evidence on school system performance to judge progress in key areas, in particular the political priorities of literacy and numeracy and, eventually, the use of ICT. The information collection of teacher assessments against the LoP in literacy and numeracy can provide a highly valid measure of school system performance. In the absence of such measures, there would be a need to introduce a different accountability measure at the primary level, which would have disadvantages as although it would clearly separate the two assessment purposes, it would introduce another measure into a system in which pupils are already being exposed to many tests. There are also pressing demands to introduce a value added measure (see Chapter 5), in which case there would presumably be demand for more than one new objective measure. The reported concerns (outlined above) relate to the use of such measures to judge school performance. This is a typical tension identified in the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment (OECD, 2013). The introduction of CBAs in Denmark shows a commitment to collecting information centrally, but there is also careful consideration of the reporting and use of results (Shewbridge et al., 2011). The collected information is used to calculate central benchmark measures that can be used by schools for their self-evaluation purposes. No individual school level results are publicly reported. At the same time, the central benchmarking measures are reported as an important measure for school system evaluation.

Actively engage educators in refining the LoP and end of key stage assessments

The OECD team recommends that the Levels of Progression are further developed and refined to ensure a valid assessment of pupil performance for formative and summative purposes at the end of the Key Stages. If the levels are to be used consistently within and across schools, the criteria need to be clearer, more detailed and fine-grained. If this is not the case, the levels will not be useful for shaping subsequent teaching and learning; nor will the teachers be likely to obtain a shared understanding of what constitutes a specific performance at the different levels of learning progression. Although experience from other OECD countries reveals that it is not an easy task to

develop criteria that are clear and widely agreed upon (Looney, 2011b; Nusche et al., 2011), it is critical to do so. OECD reviews also indicate that if assessment criteria are not clearly formulated, teachers tend to use their own experienced-based reference points instead of the set standards (OECD, 2013).

In view of this, it will be important to engage a broad and representative cross-section of teachers in the improvement of the LoP to ensure their commitment and ownership. Although the CCEA involved teachers in the LoP development process, during the OECD review many teachers expressed dissatisfaction that they had not been sufficiently involved in the development and piloting of the LoP. Teachers' faith in and commitment to the LoP thus needs to be restored through the improvement process. This is important as research indicates that teachers are likely to use assessment criteria more adequately if they have been fully involved in its development (Hargreaves et al., 1996; Frederiksen and White, 2004).

The OECD review team suggests developing an evaluation portal that provides support to educators. This should be an open, living and dynamic repository for assessment tasks, providing support to teachers in the use of formative assessment tools. Teachers should be able to add their assessment tasks to the evaluation portal, thus facilitating the sharing of good practice. This would promote an open exchange of different assessment tasks among professionals, shed light on the types of tasks being used in different schools for Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5, and promote a better understanding of assessment against each of the LoP. It could also be used to ensure that educators take a lead role in refining the LoP, including providing finer details in each level, and could encourage a higher degree of professional accountability and a continual discussion of valid assessment against the LoP.

In Denmark, for example, an evaluation portal provides guidance to teachers on how to integrate a range of different formative methods into daily teaching and on how to use the outcomes of the diagnostic CBA to shape teaching and learning (Shewbridge et al., 2011). Although the evaluation portal in Denmark could be more interactive, it is an attempt to enhance teachers' ability to effectively use formative assessment methods.

In most countries that participated in OECD reviews, there is little information provided to teachers regarding the effective implementation of formative assessment. However, a few countries seem to have invested substantially in developing and supporting teachers' understanding and use of formative assessment practices. Canada, Ireland and Norway have all emphasised their commitment to formative assessment through concrete support for teachers (See OECD, 2013, for further details).

In this context, the new moderation procedure in Northern Ireland can be a major form of professional development for teachers. In addition to ensuring the consistency of the teacher-based assessments within and across schools, external moderation is also a powerful way to promote professional development as it involves professional discussions about pupil work and learning criteria (OECD, 2013). The OECD review commends the CCEA's approach to engage working teachers to conduct the moderation procedure. This will become an important new channel for professional development, as for example, has been the experience in New Zealand where working teachers are engaged to mark pupil work in national assessments (Nusche et al., 2012). There is also great opportunity in the new moderation procedure to promote a common understanding of assessment in key areas across the primary and post-primary sectors.

Validate the central diagnostic tools and ensure they respond to educators' *needs*

High quality national, standardised tests have the potential to provide teachers with useful formative data (Chudowsky and Pellegrino, 2003). In Northern Ireland, the motivation to develop central CBAs is to provide powerful pedagogical tools for teachers to assess student learning and shape teaching to meet learner needs. These tools should support the implementation of the curriculum and assessment in relation to the Levels of Progression. In addition, CBAs have great potential to enhance efficiency as schools will not need to pay for their own tests in duplication.

However, there have clearly been implementation challenges that have damaged the credibility of NILA and NINA, the CBAs used in Northern Ireland and the OECD review team underlines the need for a thorough evaluation of these tests. In particular, they need to be validated as pertinent diagnostic measures against the LoP. The OECD review team heard some criticism that the NILA and NINA results did not match teachers' professional judgements against the LoP. In view of this, the validation process should ensure to build an evidence-based case for the validity of the test.

In addition, the process of validation should address the wide range of technical problems reported with the tests and further investigate the impact of pupils' computer skills on test results. Crucially, the CBAs should respond to educators' needs. Through a new validation process, the CCEA should ensure that NILA and NINA incorporate the functionalities that schools appreciate in the most frequently used commercial tests. If this is done successfully, it will reduce schools' needs for commercial tests.

Finally, the validation should address concerns regarding the diagnostic feedback on parental reports, which are reported to be too generic and not suited for parental feedback or for adequately informing teaching and learning. Research indicates that feedback on test results is more effective if it is fine-grained and concrete, if it is related to specific criteria, and if it is provided in a timely manner (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Swaffield, 2008). Similarly, other researchers argue that teachers find it difficult to interpret and use assessment data effectively for formative purposes if the data does not have a clear link to the curriculum or is not provided in a timely manner (Militello, Schweid and Sireci, 2010, cited in Shewbridge et al, 2011). Such issues need to be taken into account in a new validation of the CBAs.

Only very few countries have implemented computer-based adaptive national assessment for diagnostic use. Denmark has recently implemented national CBAs in seven different subjects. Although the OECD review noted that the tests needed some further validation, they provide rapid feedback of results to teachers and schools. Teachers receive results the day after the pupil has taken the test, which clearly enhances the pedagogical value of the tests. A report from the Danish Ministry of Education shows that despite initial opposition to the tests from educators, more and more teachers are beginning to integrate test results into their teaching practices (see Shewbridge et al, 2011).

The validation of the CBAs should ensure they respond to educators' needs. At the primary level, the OECD review team identified a wish, for example, for a diagnostic measure that could be used to monitor the progress of an individual pupil and cohort progression through the school. This measure should be able to provide quick feedback on results and it should be flexible to compare different groups of pupils, *e.g.* class, year level and school. A similar need for a valid diagnostic measure was identified at the post-

primary level. This should be used to assess pupil ability at an early stage and to monitor progress through the school. Such educator needs should be kept in mind when validating the CBAs or other centrally developed diagnostic tools.

Facilitate and promote the exchange of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools

The wide range of evaluation and assessment activities conducted through primary and post-primary school generate rich data on pupils, teachers and schools and their performance over time. Making best use of such data requires a coherent information management system, involving, among other things, a standard approach for data collection, a strong data management system and an approach for identifying best practices and disseminating them across the system (OECD, 2013, p. 102-103).

Schools in Northern Ireland have an embedded culture for monitoring and collecting assessment information on pupils' progress throughout their compulsory education. As noted above, all publicly funded primary and post-primary schools have access to the School Information Management System (SIMS) Assessment Manager software to record information on student performance. It seems that this data is used effectively by many schools to improve outcomes at the school level by assisting them in identifying areas for improvement and setting meaningful targets in the School Development Plan. However, the OECD team found that the data could be used more effectively to monitor pupil progress at the individual level, and in particular, at the time of transition from primary to post-primary school. Currently, post-primary schools do not appear to use the rich pupil assessment data generated in primary schools.

In view of this, the OECD review team recommend an initiative to promote a more fruitful and effective exchange of information between primary and post-primary schools. This will strengthen and better promote the curriculum's focus on the progression of pupil learning over the different Key Stages. The new moderation system, and more broadly the new assessment approach against the Levels of Progression, present opportunities for primary and post-primary schools to engage in professional discussion regarding the quality of the assessment data, in particular with regard to the primary teacher judgements against the LoP. For a number of years, post-primary schools have had little trust in the teacher-based judgements (particularly at Levels 4 and 5), yet they have not provided professional feedback to the feeder schools despite reportedly noting systematic differences from year to year. If the post-primary schools would take this opportunity to provide systematic feedback to feeder schools and the primary schools were willing to integrate the feedback into their assessment practices, this could further enhance the reliability of the teacher-based assessments as well as the assessment literacy of both parties. Furthermore, in time, it may also save the post-primary schools from having to administer a new diagnostic test when pupils enter the school to set a baseline.

The OECD review in the Slovak Republic revealed a similar challenge in the sharing of information at this key transitional stage. It operates a highly selective system and the final grades awarded to pupils at the end of primary schooling (although there are different school types and pupils may transfer at age 11, 14 or 15) are used for academic selection. Representatives from Slovak post-primary schools reported that receiving a wider array of information on pupils' learning would be very helpful and may help them see transition information as a means of ensuring challenge and curriculum progression for students, rather than primarily as a means of selection (Shewbridge et al., forthcoming). There would be interest in more qualitative information outlining, for

example, student background, interests and aptitudes and including examples of work. In Northern Ireland the compilation of pupil work in portfolios within the new moderation system could support this well.

In Northern Ireland, the new assessment arrangements at Key Stages 1 and 2 should form the basis of transitional information following pupils in their journey to Key Stage 3, to whichever type of post-primary. Primary and post-primary schools will need to come to an agreement as to what kind of supplementary assessment data is useful, in particular at the individual level, and the requirements for the generation of this assessment data. In this process it would be important to listen to the needs of the post-primary schools and, in particular, the kind of assessment data they require to: 1) continue the formative monitoring of pupils' progress at the individual level to set new targets and address individual learning needs, and 2) obtain a baseline to measure the value added by the school. At the same time, the common approach should maximise the use of existing information on pupil performance available in many primary schools. As part of this solution it would probably be necessary to enhance the functionality of the SIMS for a more effective transfer of information across levels and schools.

Recognise that the unregulated transfer test system is penalising pupils

The official policy is to not offer a test at the end of primary schooling for selection purposes, but to offer diagnostic tests through the primary level to inform teacher assessment in key areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum. International evidence from OECD's PISA indicates that school systems selecting students at an early age have larger socio-economic inequalities in learning opportunities, yet do not have better overall performance (OECD, 2010). The results for Northern Ireland show that student and school socio-economic status have a much greater impact on reading performance than on average in the OECD (Figure 1.5, Chapter 1). In Northern Ireland, official statistics clearly demonstrate that schools operating academic selection have an unambiguously more advantaged social intake: in 56 grammar schools a maximum of 10% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, but this is the case in only one of the non-selective post-primary schools (Table 1.5, Chapter 1).

Despite the Department of Education's policy to abolish official transfer tests, many post-primary schools operate a system of unregulated, commercial transfer tests. Disconnect between official policy and the educational reality has important consequences for many pupils. Arguably, the use of an unregulated transfer test system by many post-primary schools runs the risk of introducing an additional element of social selection into Northern Ireland's school system. A report on the former official transfer test found that there was a significant wash-back effect on the Key Stage 2 curriculum at the time, and that there was considerable disconnect between Key Stages 2 and 3 due to the transfer test dominance at Key Stage 2 (DENI, 2000). This is consistent with research that indicates when tests carry high stakes for pupils, and parents exert a high degree of pressure on pupils to perform well in these tests, this will inevitably lead to some sort of wash-back on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Cheng and Curtis, 2004). Reportedly, many primary schools in Northern Ireland still spend teaching time preparing pupils for the unregulated tests due to parental pressure, although the OECD review team has only anecdotal evidence of this. As there is no guarantee that unregulated transfer tests are adequately aligned with Northern Ireland's curriculum at Key Stage 2, these carry an additional risk to distort the curriculum.

The OECD review team noted that the unregulated transfer tests are penalising pupils. They are certainly a source of stress to pupils who may be sitting the tests from two consortia to keep their options open. Children who register for both unregulated tests will have to take five assessment papers over four weekends. Particularly in light of the new student assessment arrangements, it is unclear what the educational argument is to keep these tests. Primary schools and post-primary schools follow the Northern Ireland curriculum, which is common to all types of school. The curriculum and Levels of Progression are designed to promote a more coherent assessment approach through Key Stages 1 to 3. The related moderation procedure is being implemented to ensure greater consistency and reliability in these assessments within and across schools. Nearing the end of Key Stage 2, schools hold a vast amount of information on pupil performance and parents receive annual summative reports on their child's learning progress and level. It is unclear why there would be a need for any additional testing process. In the interest of ensuring minimum inconvenience to pupils, the imperative seems to be on educators to commit to the effective implementation of the official student assessment policies. At the same time, there is room for the Department of Education to take the lead in helping the more effective sharing of assessment results between primary and post-primary schools (see above).

Provide guidance to schools on how well major commercial tests match the curriculum

Schools are to a great extent relying on commercial tests to reliably measure student learning. This is partly due to the legacy of non-moderated teacher assessment in the previous assessment system at the primary level. However, there is a risk that intensive use of commercial, standardised tests will impact on the implementation of the skills-based curriculum in Northern Ireland, as they may not be adequately aligned to curricular goals.

While schools in many countries use standardised tests from private providers for formative and summative purposes, some countries seem to ensure that the tests schools choose from are aligned to the national curricula to a certain degree. In Ireland, for example, schools are required to select tests from a set range of standardised tests provided by private companies. In the Netherlands, schools are required to report on student performance at the end of primary education and they are free to use different kinds of assessment tools for this purpose. Yet, most schools choose a test developed by the Central Institute for Test Development (CITO) as this test is aligned with the national curriculum (OECD, 2013, p. 164-165).

In view of this, the OECD review team recommends a thorough and high-profile investigation into how well the most commonly used commercial tests fit the revised curriculum in Northern Ireland. This could be done by providing seed funding to educators who would then be responsible for evaluating existing tests and providing independent information on the quality and usefulness of the tests in relation to the learning objectives of the curriculum.

The outcome of such an investigation would make it more transparent for teachers and schools of which objectives in the curriculum are addressed by commercial tests and, in particular, which are not. This information would give schools a well-founded base for selecting the commercial tests best suited for the curriculum and for their different assessment needs. It would also help them understand what kind of other internal assessments they would need to use to address the whole range of skills encompassed by

the curriculum. An investigation like this could even be conducted as an official accreditation process whereby frequently used commercial tests are validated against the objectives of the revised curriculum. This could then lead to an official range of commercial tests that schools can choose from, depending on their assessment needs.

A thorough, research-based investigation like this could potentially stimulate the development of new commercial tests that would fit the curriculum better. The validation of existing tests against the curriculum would be likely to generate a more ideal set of test specifications based on which new and improved tests could be developed.

Notes

1   This majority of this section is based on the Country Background Report (DENI, 2013a).

2   For more information see:

        www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/assessment/computer_based_assessment/LettertoScho olsNINA-NILAmay2013.pdf

3   Official statistics report 68 grammar schools in Northern Ireland (see Chapter 1). One grammar school no longer uses academic selection.

4   For further information see:

        www.thetransfertest.com

        www.elevenplusexams.co.uk/schools/regions/northern-ireland-11-plus

5   Information obtained from the Northern Ireland Curriculum website:

        www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stages_1_and_2/assessment/computer_based_assessm ent/CBA_updates/

6   See: www.deni.gov.uk/index/curriculum-and-learningt-new/curriculum-and-assessment-2/assessment.htm

7   For more information see:

        www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stages_1_and_2/assessment/computer_based_assessm ent/CBA_updates/index.asp

8   59% of the respondents disagreed with "no academic selection" and 41% agreed. However, 24% of the total respondents were representatives from grammar schools (38 responses from 14 schools, of which 95% expressed disagreement) (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 68).

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Chapter 4

Teacher appraisal

The Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme (PRSD) is a comprehensive teacher appraisal system for all teachers in grant aided schools, based on a number of internationally recognised good principles. The annual process involves two lesson observations, a discussion of these observations between the reviewer and the teacher, and an action plan with objectives for personal and professional development in the following year. Teachers also get feedback during school inspections. A registration system confirms a teacher's eligibility to teach, but does not involve an appraisal of the teacher's performance or correspond to a step within the teacher's career.

This chapter looks at approaches to teacher appraisal within Northern Ireland's overall evaluation and assessment framework. Teacher appraisal refers to the evaluation of individual teachers to make a judgement about their performance and has typically two major purposes. First, it seeks to improve teachers' own practices by identifying strengths and weaknesses for further professional development: the improvement function. Second, it aims to ensure that teachers perform at their best to enhance student learning: the accountability function (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). An overview of the main features of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland is provided in Box 4.1.

Context and features

Teacher appraisal procedures

Regular teacher appraisal in Northern Ireland is conducted as part of the *Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme (PRSD)*, which applies to all teachers (including temporary, part-time and beginning teachers), as well as principals and vice-principals. The three stated aims of the PRSD are to *(i)* enhance the quality of education; *(ii)* recognise the contribution of teachers to achieving the aims of the School Development Plan and help them identify ways of enhancing their skills and performance; and *(iii)* identify the professional development needs and necessary resources to support teachers in their professional development and career progression. The review scheme was introduced in 2005 after consultation with the teacher unions and in formal agreement with all stakeholders. The PRSD review process is organised in an annual cycle comprising three stages:

- **Planning and preparation**: during this initial meeting, the reviewee and reviewer(s) meet to set objectives for the coming year, reflect on possible outcomes and agree on ways to monitor progress throughout the year. Each teacher is required to set three objectives in the areas of (i) professional practice, (ii) pupil and curriculum development and (iii) personal and professional development.

- **Monitoring**: throughout the review cycle, information relevant to the review and the documentation of progress made towards the agreed objectives is collected. It also includes observation of the reviewee in his/her work situation through classroom and/or task observation.

- **Review discussion**: at the end of the review cycle, the reviewer(s) and the reviewee assess the reviewee's performance in relation to agreed goals and establish a Review Statement which specifies the outcomes of the review and records any identified personal and professional development needs. They also agree an action plan and objectives for the next year.

The PRSD is closely linked to the school's strategic plan for improvement: the School Development Plan (SDP). The SDP brings together the school's priorities, the measures it plans to take to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these, and the key outcomes and targets for the three years ahead. Each school's Board of Governors is required to establish a Performance Review Policy, which reflects the SDP. The Boards of Governors are expected to ensure that training and development needs identified through the PRSD are reflected in the SDP and that adequate professional development opportunities are made available to all teaching staff.

Other forms of feedback for teachers

Teaching quality is also monitored by the Department of Education's Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and through the self-evaluations conducted by schools. Observation of classroom practice is a key component of all inspection visits. Inspectors typically observe teaching practice of each teacher in a given school for two lessons, and also provide individual feedback. While these observations are not intended as a summative appraisal of individual teachers, an inspector may identify underperformance and inform the school principal who is responsible for taking appropriate action.

Teachers and school principals are also responsible for the internal evaluation of teaching quality in the school (Chapter 6). The ETI's document *Together Towards Improvement* comprises an extensive set of quality indicators for schools to use in self-evaluations, which include indicators of high quality teaching and learning.

The organisation of most schools in curriculum areas further provides good conditions for regular exchange and peer learning among teachers. In some schools, curriculum area heads (i.e. heads of department in post-primary schools and literacy and numeracy coordinators in primary schools) provide regular informal observation, coaching, mentoring and feedback to their teacher peers, in addition to the formal discussion required for the PRSD process.

Competencies for appraisal

Teacher appraisal through the PRSD is conducted by the principal or a teacher reviewer appointed by the principal. Principals are responsible for ensuring that PRSD processes are fully implemented within their schools and linked to the SDP and the school's main priorities. While principals in smaller schools may review all of their teaching staff themselves, in larger schools it is more common for principals to delegate the regular implementation of the PRSD process to senior members of the teaching staff. In this case, the responsibilities for PRSD are typically distributed in line with the school's hierarchy, for example the principal will review the work of vice-principals, vice-principals will review the work of heads of departments, curriculum area heads and form teachers, who in turn will review the work of other teachers.

Principals in Northern Ireland must be fully qualified teachers. There are no other mandatory prerequisites to be eligible for principal posts, but the Employing Authorities may set their own criteria for recruiting individual principals. The Regional Training Unit (RTU) offers a Professional Qualification for Headship, which is an accredited course seeking to prepare future leaders with the necessary competencies for the profession. It is not mandatory for new principals to hold this qualification, but it is expected that they enrol in the course when taking on their position.

The introduction of the PRSD scheme in 2005 was accompanied by the provision of system-wide training to all school principals, representative governors and education officers. This training was delivered in form of a one-off training day by the Regional Training Unit (RTU), in collaboration with the Department of Education, Employing Authorities and recognised teacher unions. Preparation for PRSD is also included in the RTU training for all newly appointed principals.

Using appraisal results

Teacher appraisal results are used for a range of formative and summative purposes in Northern Ireland. The PRSD scheme is intended primarily to identify the individual

professional development needs of teachers and link these to school development planning. In addition, the results from the PRSD process are also considered when making decisions about teachers' promotion or progression to the Upper Pay Scale (see Box 4.1). Finally, the PRSD review provides an occasion to identify and address underperformance, as explained below.

When poor performance is detected in a teacher's work, the PRSD cycle is interrupted and an informal programme of support and development is put in place by the school principal in co-operation with the Employing Authority and professional development providers. While the timeframe for such support programmes may vary, the typical duration is three months. This may be followed by a formal stage which includes the issue of a formal written notice, a targeted support programme and ultimately dismissal if a satisfactory standard of work is not achieved (OECD, 2013).

A formal *Procedure for Dealing with Principals, Teachers and Vice Principals Whose Work is Unsatisfactory* has been in place since 1997. This procedure was designed by teachers' Employing Authorities in collaboration with the Department of Education, to provide a consistent approach to dealing with underperformance. Teachers for whom the procedure is invoked will not progress on the salary scale. At the time of the OECD Review, the procedure for dealing with unsatisfactory work was being reviewed and a new *Procedure for Supporting Effective Teaching in Schools* was finalised in June 2013. The new procedure is designed to help school principals, Boards of Governors and Employing Authorities adopt a consistent approach to dealing with teachers at risk of underperformance (TNC, 2013). It describes the different steps and options to be followed if a teacher's performance gives cause for concern (and informal measures have been exhausted) and explains the responsibilities of all those involved in the process. The Procedure sets a range of helpful principles and a framework for ensuring constructive professional dialogue and tailor-made responses in situations where a teacher's performance is causing concern.

Box 4.1 The teaching profession in Northern Ireland: Main features

Employment status

Teachers in Northern Ireland can have public servant or salaried employee status. They are not civil servants and do not have guaranteed employment at any stage of their career. Teachers can have open-ended or fixed-term contracts, but schools are advised to recruit teachers on a permanent basis unless the post is clearly of a temporary nature. At the time of the OECD Review visit, the relevant Employing Authority for a teacher could be one of five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) or the individual Boards of Governors of Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools. While the Employing Authorities hold the contract of employment with their teachers, the day-to-day human resource management aspects such as discipline, supervision and dismissal of staff are delegated to the Boards of Governors. The Education Bill introduced into the Assembly in October 2012 would establish the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) (see Chapter 1) and make it the employing authority for all teachers in grant-maintained schools.

Box 4.1 The teaching profession in Northern Ireland: Main features *(continued)*

Prerequisites to become a teacher and teacher recruitment

The Teachers' (Eligibility) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 as amended, determine the qualifications, age and health requirements for individuals eligible to teach in publicly funded schools (grant aided) in Northern Ireland. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 makes it mandatory for all teachers in grant-aided schools to be registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Teachers apply for a teaching post through an open competition. The Boards of Governors hold responsibility for staffing matters including the recruitment of teachers, even though these tasks may be delegated to the school principal.

At the time of the OECD Review visit, there were some variations in the processes for teacher recruitment depending on the type of school. For the controlled schools, each of the ELBs must set up a Teaching Appointment Committee and a recruitment scheme. While posts are advertised by the ELBs, the Boards of Governors are in charge of the actual interview process and submit the most suitable candidate(s) to the ELB for approval. For the Catholic-maintained schools, the CCMS is required to set up a recruitment scheme, and the recruitment process involves the Boards of Governors, the Diocesan Office and representatives of the CCMS. For the other types of schools, including Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools, the Board of Governors takes full responsibility for the recruitment process. It is expected that the implementation of the proposed ESA will bring greater unity to teacher recruitment and support functions currently provided by the five ELBs and other government-funded organisations such as the CCMS.

Teacher registration

All teachers who wish to teach in a grant-aided school in Northern Ireland need to be registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). To be eligible to register with GTCNI, teachers need to hold a teaching qualification approved by the Council and to have gained at least a grade C (or equivalent) in English and Mathematics GCSE (and in Science GCSE for primary teachers). Registration involves the payment of a registration fee, which needs to be annually renewed. The registration functions as an official confirmation of a teacher's eligibility to teach, but it does not involve an appraisal of the teacher's performance. Employing authorities are required to ensure that they only employ teachers who are registered with the GTCNI. The information held on an individual teacher's record includes the teacher's name, school, contact address, qualifications and employment history (GTCNI website).

Salary and career structure

Northern Ireland has a multilevel career structure for teachers, with two levels and a salary scale for each level. There is a Classroom Teacher scale and a Leadership/Principal scale. The classroom teacher salary scale has six steps on the Main Scale and three steps on the Upper Scale. Beginning teachers are placed on the first step of the Main Scale and move up one point every year based on satisfactory performance. Teachers who are at the top of the Main Pay Scale can apply for "threshold assessment" to move up to the Upper Pay Scale. Once on the Upper Pay Scale, they can further progress every two years until they reach the highest step. There are also five types of Teaching Allowances that schools may award to teachers for taking on substantial extra responsibilities, in line with the school's size and responsibility structure. Such extra responsibilities should be focused primarily on teaching and learning and correspond to one or more of the following criteria: *(i)* require the teacher to lead, manage and develop a subject or curriculum area, or to lead and manage pupil development across the curriculum; *(ii)* have an impact on the educational progress of pupils other than the teacher's assigned classes or groups of pupils; *(iii)* involve leading, developing and enhancing the teaching practice of other staff.

Box 4.1 The teaching profession in Northern Ireland: Main features *(continued)*

Teachers specialising in helping students with special educational needs may also receive an allowance. In addition, schools have some flexibility to provide extra pay to teachers for recruitment and retention purposes.

Initial teacher education

Initial teacher education is provided at five higher education institutions and lasts for four years. Teacher education programmes can be consecutive or concurrent. The concurrent model involves four years of study leading to a Bachelor of Education (BEd). It comprises academic studies, professional tuition and at least 32 weeks of practical teaching experience in the classroom. The consecutive model is intended for persons who already hold a Bachelor's degree. It involves one year of professional training leading to a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and at least 18 weeks (for primary education) or 24 weeks (for secondary education) of classroom-based experience. PGCE programmes have traditionally prepared student teachers for teaching in their chosen subject area at the secondary level, but PGCE programmes for primary education are now also available. After completion of an initial teacher education programme, teachers become eligible for registration with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)

Professional development

At the time of the OECD Review visit, the main providers of advisory and support services for teachers in grant-aided schools were the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) in each of the ELBs, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Regional Training Unit (RTU), which is an integral part of the ELBs' CASS. Other providers of professional development include the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), higher education institutions, further education colleges and private providers. With the implementation of the ESA in 2013, it is planned that a single school development and support service will facilitate professional development for teachers in grant-aided schools at all stages of their careers.

Sources:

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Strengths

Teachers are respected and trusted professionals

Teaching is a highly respected profession in Northern Ireland. Enrolment in teacher education courses is selective, with between six and twelve candidates per place in teacher education, depending on the programme. Teacher education institutions are governed by centrally set quotas for the number of new students they can accept. Entrants into teacher education are generally good A-Level students having achieved two or three A-grades in their leaving examinations. In addition to a strong academic profile, teacher

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education institutions can select their students based on other criteria such as commitment and empathy. Among the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, including at the school level, there was a high degree of respect for the quality of initial teacher education and the competencies of new teachers who had graduated from teacher education programmes.

The OECD review team formed the view that teachers in Northern Ireland were generally seen as trusted professionals. This is reflected in the extensive professional autonomy granted to teachers with the revised (2007) curriculum. One of the aims of the 2007 core curriculum was to provide greater flexibility to teachers in exercising their professional judgement when planning lessons and providing instruction. In line with the revised curriculum, current requirements for student assessment also emphasise and enhance the professional judgement of teachers in assessing their students (Chapter 3). Overall, teachers are given considerable scope to exercise their professionalism and appear to benefit from high levels of trust among the different stakeholder groups.

One of the consequences of being considered as trusted professionals is that teachers in Northern Ireland are open to receiving feedback and being held accountable in relation to their practice. In a 2010 survey conducted by GTCNI among a representative sample of teachers in Northern Ireland, a large majority of teachers (92%) indicated "promoting and maintaining high standards of teachers' professional competence" as an important reason for teachers to be held accountable (GTCNI, 2010). Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team said that they were eager to have more opportunities to discuss their practice. The review team saw examples of teachers developing research alongside their teaching role; teachers engaging actively with new knowledge; and schools encouraging teachers to become more inquiring and reflective practitioners and engage in collaboration with their colleagues.

There are common competence standards for teachers

Teacher competence standards are well established in Northern Ireland and provide a common understanding of what is considered "good teaching". The GTCNI's publication, *Teaching: The Reflective Profession* (2007) establishes a teacher competence model, which is intended to underpin all stages of teacher education and professional development. It describes 27 competences that teachers are expected to develop throughout their initial training and professional careers. These competences are grouped into three areas of professional practice: *(i)* professional values and practices, *(ii)* professional knowledge and understanding, and *(iii)* professional skills and applications in assessment. Each of the competences is further described and illustrated through phase exemplars for each stage of teacher education and professional learning. The Council has also developed a *Code of Values and Professional Practice* which is an integral part of the competence model.

The competence model appears to play an important role in providing coherence across initial teacher education and the early years of a teacher's career. It clarifies what is expected of new teachers and creates a common language and reference for all those involved. According to representatives of institutions providing initial teacher training, the competence model is a key document informing all initial teacher education programmes; providing a common language and shared values and objectives around teacher professionalism. In some schools, the competence model also serves as a reference for the induction and early professional development of new teachers and informs their personal action plans. It is also used by the Education and Training

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Inspectorate (ETI) as a reference for their evaluation of teaching and learning quality in schools.

Teaching standards or competency frameworks are an important element in any teacher appraisal system, as they provide a clear common reference to make judgements about teacher performance. They support the capacity of school leadership, educational authorities and others to effectively review whether teachers have attained a given level of competency. They also offer the potential to frame and align the organisation of key elements of the teaching profession, such as: initial education, registration, professional development, career advancement and teacher appraisal (OECD, 2013). While the competence model appears well established in initial teacher education in Northern Ireland, challenges remain in ensuring that it is also used as a reference for other aspects of the profession, namely: registration, regular teacher appraisal through PRSD and continuing professional development. This is explored in more details below.

The teacher appraisal model is comprehensive and thoughtfully designed

With the implementation of the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme, Northern Ireland has set up a comprehensive teacher appraisal system that is applied for every teacher in the system (including new and experienced, permanent and temporary, full-time and part-time staff) and covers all key domains of teacher practice. The system is based on a number of good principles reflecting internationally recognised good practice in teacher appraisal (Santiago and Benavides, 2009).

The main focus is on professional development and the improvement of teaching practice

Teacher appraisal in Northern Ireland is clearly oriented towards staff development and continuous improvement of practices. The identification of strengths and areas for development is a key purpose of the PRSD and the process is followed up by an action plan and objectives for personal and professional development in the following year. In a 2007 ETI review on the implementation of the PRSD scheme, almost all of the 31 schools surveyed indicated that they found the scheme beneficial in focusing staff on their training needs and on the importance of continuing professional development. The surveyed schools also considered that the PRSD provided a good focus for school improvement through the dissemination of effective teaching strategies within and across schools (DENI, 2013). In the GTCNI's 2010 survey, 83% of respondents confirmed that their professional development needs were identified through the PRSD process, and 78% of respondents indicated that they were "content" with the ways in which their needs were identified.

This logical chain between the teacher's appraisal and continuing professional development is essential to improving teaching practice. The identification of an individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses is essential for choosing professional development activities that meet the teacher's individual needs as well as the priorities in the School Development Plan. That teachers see the appraisal as a basis for future practice improvement is key to building a system where every single teacher feels concerned by the appraisal cycle and the relevant growth opportunities, regardless of their current level of performance (Isoré, 2009). It helps provide opportunities for all teachers, including the highly performing ones, to continue to learn and grow in the profession (Randi and Zeichner, 2004).

The principle of career advancement on merit is in place

In addition to its developmental function, the PRSD is also designed to provide an attestation for career and salary progression. Teachers gain access to the next salary step only if their performance is evaluated as satisfactory. This introduces an element of accountability in the annual review process. PRSD results are also one of the elements considered by school principals when making decisions about promotions or progression of teachers to the upper pay scale. Hence, in theory, teacher appraisal provides some opportunities to reward teaching performance, which can contribute to retaining effective teachers in schools and to making teaching an attractive career choice (OECD, 2005). In practice, however, schools appeared to have little room for manoeuvre to provide rewards and career opportunities to teachers identified as highly performing, and this challenge will need to be addressed (more on this below).

The appraisal cycle is firmly rooted in classroom observations and also draws on other evidence

The annual PRSD cycle involves two lesson observations, and the discussion of these observations between the teacher and the reviewer forms a key part of the appraisal process. This focus on observing classroom teaching is key to the improvement function of teacher appraisal.

Classroom observations are probably the most relevant source of information about teacher performance, as most aspects of teaching are displayed when teachers interact with their students. Only if teacher appraisal includes classroom observations, can it ensure that individual weaknesses are picked up and robustly addressed with suitable professional development action. Other indicators of teaching quality, such as lesson plans or teacher self-appraisal, are of course also important information, but they do not provide the same direct evidence as the observation of teachers in the classroom. Research indicates that if they involve high quality instruments and well-prepared observers, classroom observations are related to increases in student learning outcomes (Kane and Staiger, 2012; Kane *et al.*, 2010; Milanowski, 2004).

Alongside observation of classroom practice, the PRSD appraisal cycle monitors teachers' performance and progress in several ways, for example: objective setting, teacher self-appraisal, dialogue between the teacher and the reviewer, and analysis of documents such as the teachers' files and lesson plans. Drawing on several sources of information in this way provides opportunities to analyse different aspects of the teachers' work and to obtain a more comprehensive picture of his or her abilities (Goe et al., 2008; Peterson, 1987; Rockoff and Speroni, 2011).

A consistent central model that provides flexibility at the local level

The PRSD provides a consistent model of appraisal for all teachers across Northern Ireland, with a common competence model and a structured review cycle to be followed in all schools. This approach has the advantage of ensuring that appraisals are systematically implemented across schools and that all teachers receive feedback on their performance. The central requirements also ensure that the appraisal process is followed up with action plans for individual and school development.

At the same time, the process is sensitive to local contexts. The appraisal cycle is organised at the school level and takes into account the school context, with internal school reviewers. While the teacher competence model provides guidance on overall

competences to be achieved, teachers and their reviewers also agree on three personal objectives that are relevant to the individual teacher and the school. The PRSD process monitors the teachers' progress in relation to these objectives. Classroom observations are mandatory, however schools are free to draw on other evidence of teacher performance as they see fit. As teachers have to respond to different needs depending on local conditions, it makes sense that schools are given a degree of flexibility and freedom in the implementation of appraisal processes.

Teacher appraisal is well connected to school self-evaluation and school development

Analysis from the OECD's *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)*[1] suggests that school evaluations can be an essential component of an evaluative framework; fostering and potentially shaping teacher appraisal and feedback (OECD, 2009). Given that both school evaluation and teacher appraisal have the objectives of maintaining standards and improving student performance, there are likely to be great benefits from synergies between school evaluation and teacher appraisal processes.

The Northern Ireland teacher appraisal model stands out in its clear intention to articulate teacher appraisal, school self-evaluation and school development. The teacher appraisal process is strongly school-based and one or two of the three personal objectives teachers set in their appraisal are typically school-wide objectives. The appraisal model also emphasises that the identified professional development needs of teachers should feed into the overall school development plan. These identified individual needs are then likely to feed into the priorities addressed in school development activities.

In the schools visited by the OECD Review team, the classroom observations conducted as part of the PRSD cycle typically focussed on how teachers implemented school-wide priority issues in their own classroom teaching. In addition, most schools are structured in curriculum areas, with curriculum area heads typically working together with teachers to determine strategies and monitor progress for their particular curriculum area. This may involve informal observation, coaching and mentoring for individual teachers in the context of developing a particular curricular area within the school.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), in its external school evaluations, also provides an external view and feedback on teaching quality in the school as a whole. While it is not the ETI's role to evaluate individual teachers, inspectors do observe the teaching practice of almost every teacher in a given school and provide individual formative feedback to teachers in relation to how their teaching fits within the overall strategy and objectives of the school. The regular monitoring of schools by their Boards of Governors should validate the effectiveness of the teacher appraisal processes in place.

Involvement of teachers and their representative bodies

The involvement of teachers and their representative bodies in setting teaching standards and designing teacher appraisal approaches is essential for ensuring that such processes are effective and relevant for the teaching profession. Participation recognises teachers' professionalism, the importance of their skills and experience, and the extent of their responsibilities (Hess and West, 2006). If teacher appraisal models are developed in close co-operation with teachers and teacher professional organisations, teachers are more likely to feel ownership of the appraisal cycle and be open to receiving feedback and being appraised. A widely agreed appraisal model provides the school leadership with a

powerful tool to engage their staff in discussions about teaching quality and improvement.

In Northern Ireland, the teacher appraisal model was developed in close consultation with the teachers' representative organisations. Teachers' pay and conditions of service are discussed in the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC), which comprises the employing authorities/employer representatives, the Department of Education, and five teachers' trade unions. The TNC is also in charge of negotiating and setting the procedures for teacher appraisal. The PRSD scheme was introduced in 2005 after formal agreement to its procedures by all stakeholders and it is reviewed every two years in conjunction with the recognised teachers' unions. Other procedures concerned with reviewing teachers' performance are also set up and reviewed in close collaboration with the teachers' unions. For example, the new *Procedure for Supporting Effective Teaching in Schools* (see above) was reviewed by a working group set up by a Joint Working Party of the TNC (DENI, 2013).

In addition, the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) was established through the 1998 (NI) Order and came into being in 2002 as an independent, professional and regulatory body for teachers. It provides an "authoritative research-informed voice on behalf of the profession on all matters relating to teaching" (GTCNI, 2013). The Council is in charge of establishing and promoting professional standards for teachers, developing and applying a code of professional practice for teachers, professional registration of teachers, accrediting education courses for teachers and pre-service teachers, and working closely with government and employers to promote continuous professional learning by teachers (GTCNI, 2013). The development of the teacher competence model by a professional body for teachers is a strength of the Northern Ireland approach.

The ETI's move to involving senior teachers in inspection visits as Associate Assessors (Chapter 5) further contributes to enhancing teachers' participation in Northern Ireland's overall evaluation and assessment framework, and to strengthening teachers' voice in the external evaluation of schools. While the programme was initially targeted mostly at principals and vice-principals, the ETI has increasingly opened up this experience to senior teachers. The Associate Assessors interviewed by the OECD review team identified this as a great opportunity to feed into external school evaluation processes and develop their own teaching and leadership skills.

A coherent approach to teacher education and professional development

Providing appraisal and feedback to teachers is only effective in enhancing teaching quality if it is connected to suitable professional learning opportunities for teachers. In Northern Ireland, teacher education and professional development are conceptualised as an integrated process of learning throughout the teacher career. This process comprises four key stages that are seen as part of a continuum: *(i)* initial teacher education; *(ii)* induction; *(iii)* early professional development; and *(iv)* continuing professional development, collaborative practice and school improvement. The teacher competence model, which sets out the competencies expected of teachers at each stage, is designed to provide coherence across these different stages of learning.

A strong focus on supporting beginning teachers

Research from different countries points to the importance of providing feedback and support to beginning teachers (OECD, 2010; 2012). At this early stage of a teachers'

career, it is particularly important to ensure teachers can work in a well-supported environment and receive frequent feedback and mentoring. Most high-performing education systems require their beginning teachers to undertake a mandatory period of probation or induction during which they receive regular support and can confirm their competence to move on to the next stage of the teaching career (OECD, 2010).

The attention to supporting beginning teachers is a particular strength of the Northern Ireland approach. Upon completion of initial teacher education, a "career entry profile" is established for each beginning teacher, outlining his or her strengths and areas for further development in relation to the competence model. When taking on a first teaching position, there is a formal one-year induction period to help teachers address the personal and professional needs and objectives identified in their career entry profile. The induction period involves a programme of both centre-based and school-based professional support provided by the CASS service of each ELB. The Board of Governors, upon recommendation of the school principal, approves the teacher's completion of the induction period and the GTCNI holds a record of completion of induction.

As part of the induction process, teachers prepare a personal action plan, which forms the basis of a two-year period of Early Professional Development (EPD). This phase involves within-school support by a "teacher tutor" and the ELBs' CASS. It is aimed at helping beginner teachers further develop and consolidate their competences. When the beginning teacher and teacher-tutor agree that all the criteria for EPD have been met, they will seek confirmation by the school principal. The Board of Governors approves the completion of EPD, based on the recommendation of the principal and a final reflection document produced by the teacher concerned.

The early teacher education and development phases are further strengthened through the *Teacher Education Partnership Handbook*, which provides guidance to all those involved in the process, including student teachers, beginning teachers, teacher tutors, ELBs and higher education institutions (Eurypedia, 2013).

The availability of teacher tutors in each school is an important element in facilitating the transition of teachers from initial education into full-time teaching at a school. Teacher tutors are responsible for placement and care of student teachers in a school. They are typically senior teachers who can draw on their own experience to support beginning teachers through their first years of teaching. The tutors are expected to hold regular meetings with beginning teachers, draw up action plans, assist in lesson planning, observe classroom practice, review progress and provide general support to help the beginning teacher reflect upon his or her practice and improve classroom teaching. Tutors can play a key role in helping beginning teachers understand existing standards, self-appraise their practice and use feedback from others to review and improve their practice.

Research indicates that beginning teachers benefit from such tutoring programmes as long as tutors are carefully selected, well prepared for their tasks, and given adequate time to carry out their tutoring role (Hobson et al., 2009; OECD, 2010; Santiago *et al.*, 2013). However, it is important to note that among TALIS countries there is no quantitatively important relationship between the existence of a formal induction/mentoring process and the frequency of teacher appraisal in their first two years at school (OECD, 2009). If the purpose of induction and EPD is to strengthen observation and feedback mechanisms for beginning teachers, it is important to make such elements an explicit and expected part of the programme.

Good attention to continuing professional development

While there is no legal minimum requirement for the number of hours or days of professional development, there are a number of arrangements to ensure it is relevant and continuously undertaken by teachers. First, teachers have a professional duty to review their teaching methods and participate in arrangements for in-service training. Second, the PRSD scheme is designed to identify and address teachers' professional development needs. Third, teachers are also required to be available for work under the direction of the principal on five days outside regular teaching hours (Eurypedia, 2013).

Continuing professional development can take different forms. In the schools visited by the OECD review team, there were typically ten days foreseen in the school calendar, during which the school was closed to students and the staff were able to focus on whole-school development and training. This strong focus on school-based professional development allows schools to develop close links between individual teacher professional development and overall school development. Typically, the professional development needs of individual teachers identified through the PRSD feed into the overall school development plan, and this in turn will influence the shape and focus of whole-school professional development days. Beyond the ten formal school development days, schools appear to engage in a range of more informal arrangements for within-school professional development. An analysis of responses to the GTCNI's surveys in 2006 and 2010 indicates that in-school professional learning activities had increased considerably during these years. The proportion of respondents indicating participation in team teaching had increased from 6% to 28%, lesson observation from 4% to 58%, mentoring and support from 0.3% to 40%, and curriculum planning and development from 21% to 80%.

Other forms of professional development include collaboration across inter-school networks and activities offered by external providers. The ELBs' CASS, the CCEA and the RTU are by far the most frequent providers of professional development. Higher education institutions, further education colleges and private providers play a much smaller role. The form and duration of external professional development programmes may vary from a few hours to several days to more intensive study. Some formal professional development programmes can lead to qualifications at Master's level. Participation of teachers in such offers depends on the professional development needs of teachers and the resources available in the school (Eurypedia, 2013).

The ETI's initiative to invite practising senior teachers and school leadership staff as Associate Assessors in their inspection visits (Chapter 5) is another new form of professional learning available for teachers. While this initiative benefits the quality of inspections by bringing the view of current school staff into inspection visits, it is also an excellent opportunity for the teachers participating as Associate Assessors to learn from other schools, develop their own competencies, and reflect about effective teaching.

Ensuring coherence in teacher professional learning across a teacher's career is an important priority for the Department of Education. Following a public consultation and the completion of several commissioned studies, the Department of Education was preparing a new strategy for the future direction of teacher professional development at the time of the OECD review visit.

Challenges

The competence standards are not used as a common reference for teacher appraisal

While the teacher competence standards appear to be well established as a reference for initial teacher education, the OECD review team formed the impression that they were not generally carried forward into the practice, appraisal and review of regular teachers at more advanced stages of their career. The main references for the PRSD process are the three personal objectives set for each teacher at the school level. In addition, most schools appear to develop their own criteria and checklists for the observation of teaching practice. But none of the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team mentioned the competence model as a reference used for the PRSD, which risks weakening the alignment between initial teacher education, teacher registration, teacher appraisal, professional development, and career development that common reference standards seek to achieve.

Most reviewers involved in conducting PRSD processes for their peers have not received any training to appraise teachers in relation to the competence standards. Meaning that the point of reference of the reviewers tends to be their own teaching practice and experience rather than a deep understanding of the level of performance that can be achieved by the most effective teachers in relation to the dimensions set out in the competence standards. The lack of a common framework of references for the PRSD process is likely to weaken the capacity of reviewers to evaluate teachers in the annual review cycle. While some schools have developed their own standards and criteria based on local practice, for teacher appraisal to be effective across the system it is important that all reviewers have a shared understanding of high quality teaching.

The competence standards do not appear to inform the design and offer of continuing professional development and further education for teachers leading up to the Master's level. Representatives of the initial teacher education institutions were unhappy with the lack of coherence between initial teacher education and the continuing professional development offer for teachers.

The role of registration in the teacher career is not clear

Currently, the teacher registration process appears to serve a limited purpose. Among the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team, it was seen as a mere bureaucratic requirement they had to complete upon graduation from initial teacher education. Registration does not involve a professional appraisal or attestation of teachers' actual competences, and it does not correspond to a step within the teacher's career. All teachers having completed their initial education will be granted access to registration if they follow the required administrative procedure and annually renew the payment of a £44 registration fee. Hence for individual teachers, the registration process appeared mechanistic and of little relevance to their professional and career development.

The main function of registration seems to be to collect system level information on the teaching profession. The aggregation of data in the teacher register allows the GTCNI to obtain accurate information about the composition and characteristics of the teaching profession. This constitutes a key source of information for the development of teacher policy. The register also provides schools with access to qualification data on individual teachers, which facilitates recruitment processes and ensures that new recruits are adequately qualified for their post. While these functions are important and valuable in

their own right, there is room to further embed registration processes in wider teacher policies that benefit teachers' career development.

There are variations in the implementation of PRSD

There is a requirement in Northern Ireland that all teachers go through processes of regular performance review as part of the PRSD cycle. The OECD review team formed the impression that this requirement is largely being met. However, since schools have flexibility in the implementation of the PRSD cycle, there is potential for wide variations in the design of teacher appraisal practice at the school level.

The quality of PRSD and other arrangements for teacher appraisal and feedback largely depends on the commitment and capacity of individual school principals. Principals not only act as reviewers for vice-principals and middle management staff, but they are also responsible for the effective implementation of PRSD across the whole school. As described above, there has been a considerable focus on building leadership capacity across Northern Ireland in recent years. However, there are indications that more time and investment is necessary to ensure that all school principals provide effective human resource management and pedagogical leadership. According to the 2012 Chief Inspector's report, the quality of leadership and management in the primary schools inspected had improved by 10 percentage points since the previous report (2010), but it was still not considered good enough in 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools inspected in the reporting period.

Peer reviewers play a key role in implementing teacher appraisal. Teachers interviewed by the OECD Review team conveyed that the quality and extent of feedback they received depended considerably on the capacity and effectiveness of their individual reviewers. The experiences related by teachers to the OECD review team illustrate the wide range of different experiences with PRSD. Several teachers referred to PRSD as a "light touch" model, an approach that does not harm the routine organisation of schools, but with limited impact on teaching practice. This appeared to be related in part to the reluctance of reviewers to exercise professional judgement and make critical observations.

The responsibilities for evaluating other teachers are typically designated based on the hierarchy of the school, with teachers in senior positions (heads of department, curriculum area heads, form teachers) taking responsibility for reviews of their colleagues. Most peer reviewers involved in conducting PRSD have not been specifically trained or prepared for this function, which may reduce their willingness and capacity to evaluate their peers and provide guidance for improvement. As reviewers are typically colleagues of the reviewee, they are mindful of preserving a good school climate and positive working relationships with their colleagues. Hence, feedback was sometimes conceptualised as giving recognition and praise to the reviewee rather than providing constructive criticism and identifying areas for development. In some cases, the reviewers did not have the needed legitimacy in the eyes of reviewees to be perceived as a credible source of feedback. While seniority is an important criterion to be designated as reviewer, it does not necessarily determine whether a teacher is well placed to evaluate others.

In the GTCNI's 2010 survey, 66% of teachers expressed generally positive comments about PRSD reviewers, but a substantial minority expressed concerns. There was also a very mixed picture regarding the usefulness of the PRSD in improving teaching practice: 35% of teachers indicated that classroom observation feedback as part of the PRSD process was helpful in developing their teaching proficiency, while almost as many

respondents (33%) reported that this was not the case, and 24% were "not sure". Some teachers interviewed by the OECD review team indicated that classroom observations were more useful for the reviewer in terms of learning from other teachers' practice than for the reviewee.

Making time available for classroom observation and review was another concern, especially in primary schools where principals are typically teaching principals, and other members of the leadership team have full teaching loads. Partly due to the lack of time available, the PRSD process was sometimes limited to two announced 30-minutes observations per year and perceived as a bureaucratic process rather than a professional dialogue. In the GTCNI's 2010 survey, when asked to suggest how the PRSD process could be improved, one of the common themes mentioned by teachers was the need for the process to be less time-consuming, or for additional time to be made available to conduct the process properly.

Teacher appraisal may not focus sufficiently on individual professional development needs

Linking teacher appraisal to individual professional development is a challenge for many countries across the OECD. Among the teachers surveyed in TALIS, over 40% reported that they did not receive suggestions for improving aspects of their work and 44% agreed that teachers' work was reviewed merely to fulfil an administrative requirement. According to the reports of principals in TALIS, only 56.6% of teachers were in schools where the identification of a specific weakness in teacher appraisal leads always or most of the time to establishing a professional development plan for the teacher.

As described above, the Northern Ireland approach to teacher performance reviews is very closely linked to whole-school evaluation and development. While this is a strength in terms of achieving synergies between teacher appraisal, school evaluation and school improvement, it also carries some risks for the effectiveness of individual teacher appraisal and the identification of individual training needs.

Several stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team found that the PRSD process was more useful for school leadership and whole-school planning than for the improvement of teaching quality in the classroom. In the schools visited by the OECD review team, the teachers' individual objectives were very much influenced by the School Development Plan. For example, if the focus of the SDP was on developing ICT competency across the school or on implementing a new literacy strategy, these objectives were likely to be translated into the PRSD objectives of all teachers, with the consequent classroom observations focussing almost exclusively on how teachers were implementing these school-wide strategies.

While the focus on whole-school development is commendable and should be maintained, there is a need for individual teacher appraisals to also evaluate the teacher's practice in relation to wider indicators of "good teaching" and to consider the reviewees individual needs and priorities. Otherwise, teachers might be missing out on a genuine review of their pedagogical practice. There is a risk that the focus on a limited number of whole-school priorities reduces the relevance of the PRSD process to individual teachers, with the related danger that individual needs might be overlooked. When asked in the GTCNI's 2010 survey how their professional development needs could be better determined, over half of the respondents suggested that there was a need to better "meet individual needs" (55%) and to "provide specific and relevant training" (51%).

There is no external validation of teacher appraisal processes

Teacher appraisal through the PRSD is school-based and does not involve agents external to the school. While Boards of Governors have the role of validating school-based teacher appraisal processes, the information regarding the individual objectives and performance of teachers is not always shared with the governors, and the extent and quality of the Boards of Governors' involvement is very variable. Individual Boards of Governors may not have a clear understanding of the level of teaching performance that can be achieved by the most successful schools in order to assess the standards applied in teacher appraisal in their school. Moreover, the ETI does not have the possibility to check and validate schools' approaches to PRSD in any systematic way. While schools can volunteer to share information regarding their appraisal processes, the ETI cannot request access to such information.

The limited extent of external involvement in teacher appraisal raises some challenges. Teachers are appraised in relation to locally set objectives, using school-based criteria and indicators. As mentioned above, the competence standards, which could provide some consistency in appraisal processes across Northern Ireland, do not seem to be widely used for the PRSD process. There is therefore likely to be considerable inconsistency in the nature and rigour of the kind of judgements made in PRSD processes. Many reviewers are making their own judgements in isolation, with the consequent danger that they are either reluctant to provide substantial feedback or that they might be out-of-line and perhaps too limited in expectation in comparison with standards being applied in the best performing schools.

Given the absence of a school-external component in teacher appraisal, teachers do not have the opportunity to gain an independent or external validation of their competences. They are entirely dependent on local capacity to benefit from opportunities to improve their practice, see their professional development recognised and gain greater responsibility as they evolve in the profession. The involvement of some externality in teacher appraisal could provide an element of consistency and rigour by providing an external validation of school-based approaches to teacher appraisal. This is particularly relevant because the PRSD process can be linked to advancement in the teaching career and salary scales, which are determined centrally. In this context, an external check of school-based practices can help ensure fairness and consistency in the PRSD process and the use of its results for career advancement.

Limited use of results to inform career progression

Providing attractive career pathways for teachers is a challenge in teacher policy around the world. Findings from TALIS show that in most countries, the link between teacher appraisal and career advancement remains weak. Across TALIS countries, only 16.2% of teachers indicated that the appraisal and/or feedback they received led to a moderate or large change in the likelihood of their career advancement, and only 26.7% reported that it led to changes in work responsibilities that made their job more attractive (OECD, 2009).

The OECD review team formed the view that the PRSD scheme is currently more successful at informing the professional development of teachers rather than their career progression. In the GTCNI's 2010 survey, 59% of the respondents indicated that PRSD was "not at all" helping them to think about wider career aspirations. Only 42% felt that it had increased their participation in decision making and career planning, and 34% found that it had enhanced their morale and motivation. Stakeholders interviewed by the OECD

review team indicated that there were few possibilities to use the PRSD process to motivate, promote or incentivise strong performance. The PRSD was widely seen as a routine annual cycle to validate satisfactory performance of teachers, rather than as a motivating and rewarding system.

The nationally agreed career and salary structure appears to provide little flexibility for school principals to recognise and reward strong performance. While the Upper Pay Scale was originally created to allow school principals to incentivise and reward strong performance, currently almost all teachers who apply for "threshold assessment" have been successful in moving to the Upper Pay Scale (DENI, 2013). There is little budget for school principals to differentiate salaries according to the accomplishments of individual teachers. The absence of a clearly designed career structure is likely to undermine the potentially powerful links between teacher appraisal, professional development and career development.

A number of Teaching Allowances exist for teachers taking on substantial extra responsibilities (Box 4.1). At individual school level, the Board of Governors is required to adopt and keep under review a management structure appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the school, indicating the responsibilities attached to each position and the level of salary/teaching allowances each position attracts. However, the award of such positions and allowances is not typically linked to an appraisal of teachers' performance in relation to the competence standards.

Uncertainty about the effectiveness of teacher appraisal in identifying underperformance

Another important purpose of teacher appraisal systems internationally is to provide a mechanism to identify weaknesses in teacher performance and ensure that underperformance is adequately addressed. However, results from TALIS indicate that the use of teacher appraisal to address underperformance is not widespread. On average across TALIS countries, 51.0% of principals indicated that they would never report a teachers' underperformance to another body to take action. TALIS data also shows that a substantial number of teachers across countries had the perception that sustained underperformance is not necessarily addressed: only 23.1% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the school principal in their school would take steps to alter the monetary rewards of a persistently underperforming teacher, and only 27.9% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that in their school, teachers would be dismissed because of sustained poor performance.

In Northern Ireland, there is a formal procedure for dealing with unsatisfactory work (see above); however, little information is available on how schools use teacher appraisal and the PRSD cycle to identify underperformance. Since classroom observations appear to focus primarily on how specific school-wide priorities are implemented in the classroom, there are some doubts about whether these observations are a sufficient mechanism to ensure that weaknesses are picked up and swiftly addressed. This highlights the timeliness and expectations of the new procedures to deal with underperforming teachers and school principals. Its impact and effectiveness will partly depend on the capacity of school principals, Boards of Governors and the ETI to identify teachers facing difficulties in a timely and sensitive manner so that the Procedure can be invoked as appropriate.

Concerns about the availability of professional learning opportunities for teachers

Among many of the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, there was a degree of dissatisfaction with the current model for providing continuing professional development for teachers. The main concerns are summarised below:

- Teacher and school leadership representatives interviewed by the review team considered that there were a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers. There were concerns that some important areas of professional practice were not covered by available offers, and that provision was often too focussed on the technical and functional implementation of central initiatives rather than on deep professional learning. There was also an impression that external training was often disconnected from the particular context and challenges of an individual school.

- Representatives of initial teacher training institutions explained that despite the coherent design of professional learning as a continuum across the career (see above), the continuing professional development of teachers was in fact disconnected from professional learning in the early years of a teachers' career. The provision of CPD is typically not informed by the teacher competence standards, and there are no formal or systematic links between institutions providing initial teacher education and the professional development that takes place in schools.

- At the central level, there was concern that the past model of free provision of training through the ELBs' CASS, the CCEA and the RTU had not been meeting the training needs of schools in a cost-effective way. In the context of fiscal constraints and pressures on educational budgets, the general direction was therefore to downsize significantly the supply of professional development provided by these bodies, while refocusing available resources on professional support for schools that are underperforming.

At the time of the OECD Review visit, an important change was foreseen in the landscape of professional development providers. With the implementation of the ESA in autumn 2013, it is planned that the ELBs' professional development services will merge into a single service provider for professional development across Northern Ireland. While this development has potential benefits in terms of ensuring a coherent provision of professional development across the region, at the time of the OECD Review visit there was considerable uncertainty around the form the new school support service would take.

As schools typically do not have a dedicated training budget and the market of private training provision is relatively limited in Northern Ireland, there is little tradition of schools freely choosing from a wide offer of professional development opportunities. Beyond the 2010 GTCNI survey, there is no national-level information regarding the participation levels of teachers in professional development offers, with the general perception being that fewer teachers had been able to access external professional development more recently, and that a greater part of professional learning was expected to take place within schools.

Collaboration between schools has great potential for school improvement on a wider scale (Pont et al., 2008). There are indications that teachers in Northern Ireland appreciate this form of professional learning as the GTCNI's 2010 survey shows that outside of their

own schools, the type of professional development that teachers considered to be of the most benefit was "networking with colleagues (including online)" (29% for first and second ranking combined). However, in the Northern Ireland context, schools competing against each other to attract students (Chapter 1) may create barriers to inter-school collaboration.

Policy options

This section presents a set of policy options that aim to draw on current strengths in teacher appraisal policies and address identified challenges:

- Strengthen the role of GTCNI as an independent professional body

- Review the teacher competence model

- Establish a competence-based career structure for teachers

- Conceive registration as career-progression appraisal

- Maintain and consolidate PRSD processes for regular developmental appraisal of teachers

- Ensure that teacher appraisal is followed up with adequate professional learning opportunities

- Collect system-level information on teacher appraisal practices

Strengthen the role of GTCNI as an independent professional body

Several stakeholders voiced concerns about the visibility and legitimacy of the GTCNI as a professional body for teachers. The GTCNI is a small organisation of seventeen staff, of which three are administrative staff and seven are working on the registration team. Teachers associated the Council mostly with the requirement to pay an annual fee and with the mandatory registration process, which does not have much impact on the professional or career development of individual teachers.

According to the Department of Education, the Council does not currently hold the legislative powers necessary to regulate the teaching profession in an independent manner (Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland, 2012). Its current position as not fully independent from the government might lead teachers to perceive the GTCNI as a government body, with potentially detrimental effects on its credibility as a professional body. The Department of Education has proposed to amend the existing GTCNI legislation to provide greater independence for the Council. In the Minister of Education's statement to the Assembly on 6 November 2012, he emphasised his commitment to strengthening the role of the General Teaching Council as the professional body in supporting teachers and in upholding the highest professional standards (DENI, 2013). A consultation regarding this proposal was conducted in early 2013 (Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland, 2012).

The renewed and strengthened role of the GTCNI has the potential to enhance the Council's role as a fully-fledged professional body, establishing coherence across teacher professional learning and career advancement. Beyond changes in its status, the GTCNI will need to provide strong leadership and a vision for the teaching profession. This could involve the revision of the teacher competence standards to reflect different roles and responsibilities of teachers in schools, the design of a competence-based teacher career

structure, and the further development of registration processes to involve an appraisal of competences at key stages of the teacher career. These suggestions will be described in more detail below.

Review the teacher competence model

A framework of teaching standards is an important reference point for teacher appraisal. While competence standards for teachers exist and are widely used in initial teacher education in Northern Ireland, their use for regular appraisal and professional development in schools is limited. To ensure coherence between initial teacher education, registration, appraisal and professional development, it is essential to promote the wider use of the competence standards that underlie all of these processes as a working document in schools.

To understand why schools are not currently using the competence standards for internal appraisal and PRSD, it would be helpful to conduct a thematic review on the use of teaching standards and criteria by schools. This would help understand how the central standards are currently viewed and used, what are seen as most powerful and productive elements, what issues it raises for effective teacher appraisal, what additional checklists and criteria schools have developed themselves, and how the competence model might be simplified or further developed. The ETI appears well placed to collect such information from schools. It would then be the role of the GTCNI to use the results of the review to revise the teaching standards in close collaboration with stakeholders in schools.

It would be useful to develop clearer descriptions of the competencies necessary for different roles and career steps for teachers. This would not necessarily require different standards across stages of the teaching career, but could involve a single set of standards with appraisal criteria specific to distinct career levels. Such a revision of the competence standards would help recognise the variety of responsibilities in today's schools and the expertise developed while on the job. The description of competences should be complemented by criteria and illustrations of effective practice, to help make the standards operational for regular use in school-based teacher appraisal.

Establish a competence-based career structure for teachers

There is room to further develop the teacher career structure in Northern Ireland in order to recognise and reward teaching excellence and allow teachers to diversify their careers. Schools and teachers could benefit from a more elaborate career structure for teachers comprised of a number of key stages. Access to each of the key stages could be associated with a formal appraisal process through the teacher registration system (more on this below). An important policy objective should be to match the career structure for teachers with the different types and levels of expertise described in the revised teacher competence standards. This would strengthen the incentive for teachers to improve their competences and reinforce the matching between teachers' competences and the roles that need to be performed in schools to improve student learning.

Some countries link teacher assessments with opportunities for vertical promotions to school leadership positions. But the practice of linking outstanding teacher performance to promotions for school leadership positions may not respond well to the needs of most teachers, for two main reasons. First, a good teacher is not necessarily a good manager or leader and the skills required for teaching a classroom and managing a school are not the same. Second, this practice may have adverse effects on teaching quality within a school because, paradoxically, the best teachers are rewarded by being removed from classroom

teaching. To resolve this dilemma, some education systems have attempted to build career options for excellent teachers who wish to remain in the classroom (Box 4.2 provides examples from Singapore and Australia). When designing a career structure for teachers, education authorities should make sure that career pathways are varied with some teachers moving into leadership roles while others remain predominantly teaching in the classroom.

Box 4.2 Teacher career structures in Australia and Singapore

Australia: Advanced Skills Teaching positions

Teachers in Australia undergo appraisal, on a voluntary basis, to gain promotion positions in schools in recognition of quality teaching performance by applying for Advanced Skills Teaching positions (ASTs). These positions are linked to higher pay and are generally associated with further responsibilities and specific roles in schools. In most cases, teachers do not have to be at the top of the salary scale to apply for these positions, which entails a thorough assessment of their performance. Advanced Skills Teaching positions, which exist in almost all educational jurisdictions, for the most part accomplish two important functions: the recognition of advanced teaching skills with a formal position and additional pay; and a better match between teachers' skills and the roles and responsibilities needed in schools through competitions to gain the positions. These have the benefit of rewarding teachers who choose to remain in the classroom rather than to move into management positions.

AST positions embody two key concepts in the teaching profession in Australia. First, they recognise the need to introduce career diversification as a result of the greater variety of roles in schools – e.g. departmental head, team leader, and manager of curriculum development and/or personnel development. Second, they reflect the need to reward teachers for their developing skills, performance and responsibilities, in what constitutes a competency-based professional career ladder. Teachers, as they access AST positions, are expected to have deeper levels of knowledge, demonstrate more sophisticated and effective teaching, take on responsibility for co-curricular aspects of the school, assist colleagues and so on. Access to AST positions involves formal appraisal processes which are more summative in nature.

- **New South Wales** introduced the Highly Accomplished Teacher (HAT) position in July 2009. The HAT position is an initiative of the Smarter Schools National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality. A HAT is an excellent teacher who models high-quality teaching for his/her colleagues across the school and leads other teachers in the development and refinement of their teaching practice to improve student learning outcomes. HAT positions are classroom-based positions with a reduced teaching allocation to enable them to mentor other teachers, including student teachers, beginning and more experienced teachers, work with university partners and take a role in the school's leadership team. HATs are appointed through a merit selection process which requires, as a prerequisite, application to the NSW Institute of Teachers for consideration of accreditation at Professional Accomplishment or Professional Leadership. These positions are two-year appointments and are limited to 100 positions over the life of the National Partnerships.

- The **Northern Territory's** Accomplished Teacher status requires applicants to participate in an "inquiry process" over 12 months, based on the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Accomplished Standards of Professional Practice for Teaching. The assessment of performance is undertaken by assessment panels and moderation committees and includes the appraisal of teaching modelling and role in curriculum and professional learning. This process was being reviewed in 2011.

Box 4.2 Teacher career structures in Australia and Singapore (continued)

- In **Tasmania**, the Advanced Skills Teacher position recognises outstanding classroom teachers and leading staff members. It is targeted at teachers recognised as exemplary practitioners, who are accorded additional responsibilities within their school. It is a promotion available to any permanent teacher who satisfies the application process, operating in a similar way to a salary increment. Positions are advertised by individual schools on a needs basis.

- The **Victorian** school system includes one promotional appointment for those teachers who want to remain in the classroom: Leading Teacher. The programme is intended to serve the dual purpose of recognising outstanding classroom teachers; and providing schools with a human resource to lead various in-school programmes and projects. Schools advertise for Leading Teacher positions on a needs basis – the position is usually associated with a specific anticipated responsibility. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development aims to maintain a Leading Teacher profile of 10 to 15% of full-time teaching staff.

Singapore: Linking teacher appraisal to career pathways

The Education Service Professional Development and Career Plan (Edu-Pac) in Singapore recognises that teachers have different interests and aspirations and provides three different career tracks for teachers:

- The **Teaching Track** allows teachers to remain in the classroom and advance to the levels of Senior Teacher, Lead Teacher or Master Teacher. This provides an opportunity for teachers to focus on classroom teaching while obtaining a leadership role along with a senior-level salary.

- The **Leadership Track** provides opportunity for teachers to take on leadership positions within the school or at the Ministry of Education.

- The **Senior Specialist Track** allows teachers to join the Ministry of Education's headquarters and as specialists with particular expertise in specific aspects of education.

The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS) serves to support teachers' professional and career development and its results inform promotion decisions as part of Edu-Pac. The EPMS process involves performance planning, performance coaching and performance appraisal. Performance planning involves a teacher self-appraisal and a discussion with the teachers' reporting officer (typically a Head of Department) about target setting and performance benchmarking. Performance coaching is ongoing and includes a formal mid-year review between the teacher and the reporting officer. Finally, the performance appraisal at the end of the year includes an appraisal interview and a rating of actual performance against planned performance. Teachers are appraised based on actual achievement as well as potential for future performance. Decisions on the teacher's "current estimated potential" are made in consultation with senior colleagues of the teacher based on observation, dialogue, portfolio evidence and the teacher's contributions to the school and its environment. The final performance grade affects the annual performance bonus received for the year's work as well as promotions to the next level of the career pathway.

Sources:

Lee, C.K. and M.Y. Tan (2010), *Rating Teachers and Rewarding Teacher Performance: The Context of Singapore*, Paper presented at APEC Conference on Replicating Exemplary Practices in Mathematics Education, Koh Samui, Thailand, 7-12 March 2010.

Weinstein, T. L. and K. S. Struthers (2012), "Similar Demands, Different Responses: Teacher Evaluation in the United Kingdom and Singapore", *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1, International Association of Educators, Urbana, IL.

Conceive registration as career-progression appraisal

As described above, teacher registration does not currently constitute a major step in the teacher's career. To make registration meaningful for teachers, it could have a main purpose of holding teachers accountable for their practice and determining advancement in their teaching career. This redefinition of teacher registration would convey the message that registration is not merely a formality and that reaching high standards of competence is the main road to career advancement in the profession.

This would imply that registration should be based on a review of teachers' actual practice. One way of organising such a registration system would be to require graduates from initial teacher education to apply to be "provisionally registered" with the GTCNI in order to seek employment as a teacher. Provisionally registered teachers could then apply for full registration upon completion of their Induction and Early Professional Development Programme. Full registration should be linked to an appraisal in relation to the revised competence standards. Access to a promotion for fully registered teachers could be through a voluntary application process and teachers should be required to periodically renew their registration status when not applying for a promotion. Box 4.3 provides an example from Australia.

Box 4.3 Teacher registration in Australia

Registration is a requirement for teachers to teach in Australian schools, regardless of school sector. All states and territories have existing statutory teacher registration authorities responsible for registering teachers as competent for practice. The levels of teaching registration vary according to the jurisdiction. In most jurisdictions, teachers reach the first level of registration from the relevant authority upon graduation from an approved initial teacher education programme. Currently, each teacher registration authority has its own distinct set of standards for registration; however, from 2013 jurisdictions will be progressively introducing the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) which will provide a national measure for teachers' professional practice and knowledge. Advancement to full registration (or professional competence) is achieved after a period of employed teaching practice and, from 2013, an appraisal against the Standards at Proficient level.

In all states and territories, after teachers have initially become registered within their jurisdiction, they must renew their registration. The period of registration varies but is most commonly five years. The main function of the registration process is that of certifying teachers as fit for the profession mainly through the mandatory process of accessing or maintaining "Full/Competence" status – as such, these processes ensure minimum requirements for teaching are met by practising teachers. Registration processes constitute a powerful quality assurance mechanism to ensure that every school in Australia is staffed with teachers with suitable qualifications who meet prescribed standards for teaching practice. At their initial level (provisional/graduate registration), they also provide a policy lever for setting entrance criteria for the teaching profession and, through the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes, strengthen the alignment between initial teacher education and the needs of schools.

Source: Santiago, P., et al. (2011),*OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Australia 2011*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264116672-en

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Appraisal for registration/career progression is summative in nature and would need to ensure that competence standards are consistently applied across schools and teachers.

This suggests that processes for registration and registration renewal should involve an element of externality. Appraisal for registration and registration renewal could be mostly a school-based process approved by the principal and the Board of Governors, but should include an external view, for example through an accredited external evaluator. This could be a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area as the teacher being appraised. External evaluators would receive specific training for this function, in particular in standards-based methods for appraising evidence of teacher performance, and would need to be accredited by the GTCNI for this function. The appraisal for registration and registration renewal should be firmly based on classroom observation and include reference to a range of evidence indicating effective teaching, such as teacher portfolios and evidence of student learning (Santiago and Benavides, 2009).

Such career-progression appraisal is also the basis for recognition and celebration of a teacher's work. It provides opportunities to recognise and reward teaching competence and performance, which is essential to retaining effective teachers in schools as well as in making teaching an attractive career choice (OECD, 2005). It does not directly link appraisal results with teacher pay but instead, to career progression, therefore establishing an indirect link with salaries. This is a desirable option as direct links between teacher performance and pay have produced mixed results according to the research literature (Harvey-Beavis, 2003; OECD, 2005). As such, appraisal for career progression (or teacher registration) would fulfil the function of formally recognising the knowledge, skills sets and experience acquired in the profession, which presupposes that teachers have access to the related professional development opportunities.

Maintain and consolidate PRSD processes for regular developmental appraisal of teachers

While PRSD was designed to achieve both developmental and accountability functions, experience to date indicates that its developmental function has been predominantly in practice. This is appropriate given that there are risks in combining developmental functions and high-stakes accountability functions in a single teacher appraisal process (Isoré, 2009). Teachers may be less open to reveal any problems or weaknesses in the appraisal process if it is connected to high-stakes consequences on their career or salary progression (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). This, in turn, can jeopardise the improvement function of the appraisal process. The OECD review team therefore recommends that the PRSD process retains its predominantly developmental character.

While the PRSD process overall is well designed and well accepted among stakeholders, the analysis above suggests that a few adjustments could further enhance its role in helping teachers improve their practice. First, while the process should be school-based and retain its close link to the School Development Plan, it should be underpinned by common reference standards of "good teaching" (the revised competence model discussed above) and not focus exclusively on the three personal objectives defined at the school level. There should be particular attention to the objective of improving the learning of all students, and particularly for groups identified as underperforming.

Second, peer reviewers should receive specific training for observing classroom practice and providing effective feedback for the improvement of teaching practice. Developing skills and competencies for teacher appraisal across the school system takes time and requires a substantial commitment from both education authorities and the main actors involved in teacher appraisal. Considerable time is needed for explanation of teacher appraisal; consensus building among stakeholders about the indicators and norms

that make up school or teacher quality; preparing and training of evaluators in terms of methodology, techniques and approaches; and providing time and resources for schools and teachers to implement and adapt processes at the school level (OECD, 2013). Box 4.4 provides examples from Chile and Portugal, two countries that also use peer reviewers for teacher appraisal.

Box 4.4 Building capacity for peer appraisal in Portugal and Chile

Teacher appraisal in **Portugal** relies almost entirely on peer appraisal. All key roles in teacher appraisal, including performance appraisal as well as co-ordination, counselling and pedagogical supervision, are exercised by teachers. To enhance capacity for appraisal at the school level, the Ministry of Education entered into a contract with a higher education institution as the managing organisation responsible for launching an in-service training system for teacher appraisal. In the first half of 2011, 50 teachers with a Master's degree in the field of evaluation were identified from Portugal's five educational regions to participate in specialised training on teacher appraisal including classroom observation. In this post-graduate training, particular emphasis was placed on classroom observation, as this was seen as the area that could have the greatest impact on improving teaching and learning. Upon completion of the training, it was expected that this first group of highly qualified teachers would be able to act as multipliers and provide training in teacher appraisal to other the teachers in their schools.

One of the characteristics of **Chile**'s teacher appraisal approach (*Docentemás)* is the high involvement of practising teachers as evaluators. The participation of teachers at various stages of the appraisal process contributes to building ownership and appraisal competency among teachers and may also help them to understand and benefit from their own appraisal to a greater extent. Practising teachers can apply to two key roles in the appraisal process: *(i)* as evaluators of teacher portfolios in one of the centres set up for this purpose by *Docentemás* in various universities; and *(ii)* 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 learned, 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.

Sources:
Santiago, P., et al. (2012),*OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Portugal 2012*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264117020-en

Santiago, P., et al. (2013),*Teacher Evaluation in Chile 2013*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264172616-en

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Third, in order to guarantee the systematic and coherent application of developmental appraisal through the PRSD, it would be important to ensure an external validation of school-based PRSD processes. One option is that school inspections performed by the

ETI in their evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, include a review of the school's PRSD processes, holding the school principal and the Board of Governors accountable as necessary. This would ensure that minimum standards for developmental teacher appraisal are met and that every teacher receives regular professional feedback. An implication is that schools would need to document their PRSD processes to some extent.

Developmental appraisal (PRSD) and career progression appraisal (registration) should not be completely disconnected from each other. A possible link is that appraisal for teacher registration takes into account the regular qualitative appraisals produced through the PRSD process. This could be done, for example, through a portfolio bringing together the documentary evidence of performance provided by teachers throughout their PRSD cycles. Also, in spite of its emphasis on teacher development, the PRSD process should retain its function of identifying sustained underperformance with possible consequences for the maintenance of teacher registration and eligibility to salary increments.

Ensure that teacher appraisal is followed up with adequate professional learning opportunities

Without a clear link to professional growth opportunities, the impact of teacher appraisal on teaching and learning will be relatively limited (Goe et al., 2012). Where the appraisal is not followed up with professional development that is relevant to the individual teacher, the appraisal process may not be taken seriously or may encounter mistrust or apathy by the teachers being appraised (Danielson, 2001; Milanowski and Kimball, 2003; Margo et al., 2008). Ideally, teacher appraisal should result in tailored feedback for each teacher, which should be followed up with learning opportunities through professional development, mentoring or other means (Hill and Herlihy, 2011). The creation of the ESA provides an opportunity to review and reorganise the supply of support for teacher professional development and school development. Combining the ELBs' CASS services into a single provider for teacher professional development may allow a more consistent approach for teacher professional learning across the entire region, ensuring that all key areas of demand are covered through adequate training offers.

It is important to plan for innovative ways of organising the local delivery of learning opportunities and there is a need to envisage teachers' learning as something broader than participation in training courses. According to Timperley (2011), the term "professional development" is now mostly associated with the delivery of information to teachers in order to influence their practice. By contrast, the term "professional learning" refers more to an internal process in which teachers create professional knowledge through interaction with information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings. Alternative ways of professional learning could include the creation of "teaching schools" where practitioners visit other schools and exchange practical advice, action research and collaboration between schools within a geographical area.

However, in a context where schools are competing with each other for students, such collaboration is not likely to happen naturally or automatically. Mechanisms need to be in place to leverage school-based expertise and to motivate and reward good practice schools for sharing their practice and working with practitioners from other schools. The creation of Area Learning Communities appears to have greatly helped in strengthening collaboration and peer learning among the participating schools (see Chapter 1).

However, this initiative has so far been limited to post-primary schools and is focused on the implementation of the Entitlement Framework. Extending the Area Learning Communities approach to primary schools and widening the scope of collaboration activities has the potential to further enhance peer learning among schools. Such school networks should also be more strongly connected to different support agencies at the local level.

Collect system-level information on teacher appraisal practices

For the design of teacher policy, including approaches to teacher appraisal, it is important for policy makers and relevant agencies to have information about school-based processes for teacher appraisal. Even though the GTCNI conducts a four-yearly survey "Teachers' Voice", there are some information gaps. For example, little is known about the standards and criteria that reviewers use to appraise teachers as part of the PRSD process, or about the way the PRSD results are used to address underperformance. There are several options to collect such information. The ETI could conduct a thematic inspection about different forms of teacher appraisal at the school level. This could also help mobilise and disseminate school-based expertise and innovative approaches. Another option for Northern Ireland to consider is to participate in the OECD's *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS), which collects teachers' and school principals' views on their working environment, in an international comparative perspective. TALIS focuses on lower secondary education and seeks to provide policy-relevant information on: how teachers' work is appraised and the feedback they receive; teachers' professional development; teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching and their pedagogical activities; and the role and functioning of school leadership.

Notes

1   TALIS is the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey, which was implemented in 2007-08, covering lower secondary education and with the participation of 23 countries (OECD, 2009). The results derived from TALIS are based on self-reports from teachers and principals and therefore represent their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and their accounts of their activities. Further information is available at www.oecd.org/edu/talis. The second cycle of TALIS (TALIS 2013) is being conducted in 2012-13.

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Chapter 5

School evaluation

For many years, schools have been required to undertake school development planning and offered supporting tools, but recent policies aim to strengthen the role of self-evaluation. A well established system of external school evaluation incorporates quality assurance and transparency of procedures and results. Since 2010, the Education and Training Inspectorate is rolling out a more proportionate and risk-based approach to school inspection, which puts an increased focus on school self-evaluation. The Department of Education produces comparative school performance measures that feed into school evaluation and are used to promote school system improvement. A Formal Intervention Process allows the Department to intervene more actively in schools that are identified as in need of improvement. There is a proposal to reorganise traditional school support services within a new Education and Skills Authority.

Context and features

Overview of the approach to school evaluation

In Northern Ireland, there are well established mechanisms for both school self-evaluation and external school evaluation. Both types of evaluation draw on comparative school performance measures and these are used to promote school system improvement.

Schools are governed by a Board of Governors (BoG) and are responsible for self-evaluation and school improvement. A legal framework for school self-evaluation was put in place by the 1998 Education Order, which introduced a mandatory school development planning process. More recently, the Department of Education has developed policies that strengthen the focus on school self-evaluation for improvement: *Every School a Good School (ESaGS)* (DENI, 2009), updated guidance for school development planning (DENI, 2010) and *Count, Read: Succeed* (DENI, 2011).

The Department of Education is legally responsible for the external evaluation of schools, as specified in the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Within the Department of Education, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carries out the external evaluation (known as "inspection") of early years, primary, special and post-primary schools. The ETI also inspects professional teacher education, further education and work-based learning provisions on behalf of the Department for Employment and Learning, provision for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and works along with the Criminal Justice Inspection in prison inspections. Since 2010, the ETI is rolling out a more proportionate and risk-based approach to school inspection, which puts an increased focus on school self-evaluation. The ESaGS policy also includes a mechanism for the Department of Education to intervene more actively in schools that are identified as in need of improvement.

The aim of school evaluation is to improve student learning and student outcomes. Historically, there has been a school support function offered by the Education and Library Boards (ELB). In the proposed Education Bill 2012, the Department of Education envisages a new body, the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), to offer support to all schools. This dynamic is an important context for the OECD review team findings.

Responsibilities and roles in school self-evaluation

Since 1998, school self-evaluation has been firmly rooted in the School Development Plan (SDP)[1]. Boards of Governors have the duty to prepare, and periodically revise, an SDP. They can delegate the execution of this to the school principal, but the BoG has to approve the SDP formally. The SDP contains school aims, targets for raising standards, evaluations of where the school stands at a certain starting point, and assessments of the attainment of school aims and student results.[2] School self-evaluation is built into the SDP process. Schools are encouraged to be ambitious in their aims: the main objective of the SDP is that schools choose priorities and measures to raise standards.[3] The *Every School a Good School* policy (DENI, 2009) reaffirms the school's responsibility for improvement (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 The Every School a Good School policy

Every School a Good School (ESaGS) weaves the Department of Education's policy to raise standards into the actions schools take. The ESaGS policy is based on the premise that schools themselves are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can produce better outcomes for pupils.

Schools are accountable to parents for the action plans that summarise their results and the actions taken to improve further. Schools are encouraged to publish these on their websites for a broader public.

The key principles of the ESaGS strategy emphasise the school's responsibility for improvement:

- The recognition that every school is capable of improvement; that the school is best placed to identify particular areas for improvement; and that sustained improvement comes from within the school;

- The recognition that, while the Department of Education and its support bodies are accountable for overall standards, it is the school and its Board of Governors that is accountable for the standards achieved by its pupils;

- The recognition that the improvement process is a collaborative one, requiring communication and co-operation within the school and between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves.

But key principles also recognise the need for adequate support services for schools and, if necessary, external intervention:

- An acceptance that support from their governors and from the education support bodies is vital in ensuring that schools can deliver sustained improvement;

- A recognition that there will, at times, be a need for an external view of progress as well as support and, possibly, more active interventions to ensure, in keeping with the pupil-centred focus of the policy, that poor quality educational experiences are not allowed to continue;

- A corresponding need for the nature and purpose of any interventions to be clearly explained and fairly applied.

Source: DENI (Department of Education, Northern Ireland) (2009), *Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement*, DENI, Bangor, www.deni.gov.uk/esags_policy_for_school_improvement_-_final_version_05-05-2009.pdf.

Envisaged role for the proposed Education and Skills Authority

The ESaGS strategy (DENI, 2009) aims "to provide the support systems needed to help all schools to engage positively in robust self-evaluation and to use the findings from self-assessment and performance and other data to determine priorities and to plan for continuing development". The proposed Education and Skills Authority (ESA) would be responsible for school improvement functions. School principals and Boards of Governors will be required to co-operate with the ESA on school improvement. They will also be accountable to the ESA for the quality of provision and the standards attained by pupils. The ESA will be responsible for:

1. monitoring the performance of individual schools, particularly the standards of attainment;

2. challenging schools about their performance where it is clearly declining or where the ETI identifies weaknesses;

3. providing the necessary support to schools seeking to improve;

4. taking the actions required to deliver and sustain improved performance in those schools where provision and progress is deemed unsatisfactory. (ESaGS, p.44).

ESaGS envisaged that the ESA would be established in 2010.[4]

Policy documents ESaGS (DENI, 2009) and *Count, Read: Succeed* (DENI, 2011) state that the Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in the case of Catholic maintained schools, and later the ESA, will:

1. support schools in preparing their School Development Plan, drawing on benchmarking data and providing guidance;

2. monitor the quality of each School Development Plan and provide feedback to the school;

3. assess the appropriateness of the school's annual literacy and numeracy targets;

4. monitor each school's achievement in literacy and numeracy;

5. challenge (where necessary) any grant-aided schools on their plans, targets or outcomes. (DENI 2011, paragraph 3.5).

Responsibilities and roles in external school evaluation

The legal framework for school inspection is set out in the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which grants the Department of Education inspection powers. Within the Department of Education, external school evaluation is carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). The ETI's mission is "promoting improvement in the interest of all learners" (ETI, 2012a). Its work consists of:

1. providing an unbiased, independent, professional assessment of the quality of learning and teaching, including the standards achieved by learners;

2. identifying and reporting on educational developments;

3. commenting on the influence and outcomes of the policies of the three departments (Department of Education, Department for Employment and Learning and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure) within the education, training and youth sectors;

4. publishing reports on individual organisations, and summary reports on aspects of the quality of educational, training and youth sectors in Northern Ireland.

Tasks 1 and 4 make up the heart of external school evaluation and will be discussed below. Tasks 2 and 3 show the bridging function that the ETI has between schools and policy. On the one hand, they hold schools accountable for results attained. On the other hand, they can judge the outcomes of departmental policies on the basis of information acquired within the schools themselves. The ETI can also identify more generally factors within the school system that explain differences in educational quality, which can

provide important information for system improvement. This is explained in more detail in Chapter 6.

Responsibility for school principal appraisal

School principal appraisal is undertaken within the Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme (PRSD) (see Chapter 4 for an overview) and is the responsibility of the Board of Governors. Together with the principal, the BoG establishes a set of objectives at the beginning of the appraisal cycle for the year ahead. It reflects on possible outcomes and agrees how best to maintain progress. The objectives need to be related to three key areas: *(i)* leadership and management; *(ii)* pupil and curriculum development; and *(iii)* the personal and professional development of the principal. The objectives also need to reflect the School Development Plan. During the review year, related evidence is collected and the progress towards the objectives is assessed in a final review discussion that results in a Review Statement (DENI, 2013).

Articulation between school evaluation and teacher appraisal

Teacher appraisal should form an integral part of the school development planning process (see also Chapter 4). The School Development Plan should provide an evaluation of the professional development for staff and there is an expectation that this links to the PRSD scheme. The Board of Governors has a legal responsibility to ensure that the professional development and performance of teachers employed within their schools is reviewed annually in accordance with this Scheme and within the context of the School Development Plan. Employing Authorities have a statutory duty to promote the effective management of schools.

Although the ETI evaluates the quality of school development planning, it does not evaluate or access the results of the PRSD.

Indicators and tools used in school self-evaluation

The *Every School a Good School* policy (DENI, 2009) specifies areas to be addressed in school self-evaluation and the regulations for school development planning were revised accordingly in 2010. Along with a financial assessment and an assessment of school progress against specified targets, schools must present a summary and evaluation of the school's strategies for:[5]

a) learning, teaching, assessment, and the raising of standards of attainment among all pupils, in particular in communication, using mathematics and using Information and Communications Technologies (ICT);

b) providing for the special, additional or other individual educational needs of pupils;

c) promoting the health and well-being, child protection, attendance, good behaviour and discipline of pupils;

d) providing for the professional development of staff;

e) managing the attendance and promoting the health and well-being of staff;

f) promoting links with the parents of pupils at the school and the local community, including other schools, the business community and voluntary and statutory bodies;

g) promoting the effective use of ICT, including its use to support learning and teaching, continuing professional development and school leadership and management.

Schools are expected to use performance and other data in making these evaluations. However, schools are free to choose their approach to self-evaluation and official policy encourages creativity. The Department of Education's guidance for school development planning offers a set of characteristics in four broad areas for self-evaluation: child centred provision; effective leadership; high quality teaching and learning; and the school connected to its community[6]. It also includes an annex providing references to different self-evaluation approaches and tools, as well as an annex with the school evaluation judgements (performance descriptors) used by the ETI in external evaluation. The guidance for school self-evaluation was developed collaboratively by a small working group of representatives from school principals, Education and Library Boards, CCMS, C2k and the Department of Education including the ETI.

There are a number of centrally developed supporting tools offered to schools. The ETI has developed supporting self-evaluation tools that mirror the key questions and quality indicators used in external school evaluation (see Box 5.3). A major supporting tool for self-evaluation is the ETI series *Together Towards Improvement* (ETI, 2013). This series of documents presents different sets of quality indicators which have been developed to support primary schools, post-primary schools and schools offering special educational programmes. The ETI has also developed evaluation materials for specific subjects, as well as specific pre-inspection material for short inspections in primary schools[7].

To help support schools in their statutory self-evaluation, the Department of Education provides a tailored set of benchmark data to each school (see Box 5.2). These are also sent directly to the Board of Governors. An important support tool for schools that was developed by the five ELBs is Classroom 2000 (C2k). C2k is a project that provides the infrastructure and services to support the enhanced use of ICT in schools in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education sends the benchmarking data to schools using C2k.[8] As part of the C2k service, each school has access to a School Information Management System, including an Assessment Manager software.

Box 5.2 Benchmarking data provided to schools by the Department of Education

The Department of Education provides each school with a set of benchmarking data that can support self-evaluation activities. Data are compiled from the Annual school census (Census), the School Leavers Survey (SLS), the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER), data collected by the CCEA and the Education and Library Boards (ELB), and the Teacher Payroll. A series of indicators are presented with the school result, plus averages for Northern Ireland and in the case of post-primary schools, averages for grammar schools and non-selective post-primary schools ("non-grammar"). For example, benchmarks provided to post-primary schools include (not exhaustively):

- percentage of students staying on (Year 12 to Year 13 / Year 13 to Year 14) (Census)

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Box 5.2 Benchmarking data provided to schools by the Department of Education *(continued)*

- pupil attendance (average rate for Years 8 to 12) (Census)

- school leavers achievement by gender (male/female), free school meal entitlement (FSME/non-FSME) and Special Educational Needs status (SEN Stages 1-5/non-SEN) (SLS)

- percentage of school leavers by destination (employment / further education / higher education / training / unemployed / unknown) (SLS)

- percentage of Year 12 pupils achieving different qualification benchmarks (GCSE or equivalent – 5 / 7 / including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics) (SAER)

- percentage of pupils in final year of an A level or equivalent course of study achieving qualification benchmarks (3+ A level A*-C / 2+ A level A*-E) (SAER)

- percentage of pupils achieving KS3 English and mathematics (Level 5 or above / Level 6 or above) (CCEA)

- percentage of pupils suspended (Years 8 to 12) (ELB)

- days lost per teacher due to sickness (for all schools except voluntary grammar schools) (Payroll)

- pupil teacher ratio (Payroll)

The data set also includes a series of graphs, presenting anonymised scatter plots of school averages for each post-primary school, with the specified school highlighted (Y axis percentage of pupils achieving specified qualification; X axis percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals).

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Indicators and procedures used in external school evaluation

Different types of external school evaluation (inspection)

At time of the OECD review, there were two main forms of inspection in the primary sector: focused and short. A focused inspection (typically five days) is a full inspection of achievements and standards, quality of provision for learning and leadership and management and usually includes a pre-inspection visit. A short inspection (typically two days) inspects the same domain; however, it contains a stronger element of self-evaluation and is conducted in small primary schools or in those deemed to be low risk. A short inspection may not include a pre-inspection visit. This reflects a risk-based approach. The number of inspectors depends on the number of teachers in a school. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, there is just one approach to primary school inspection with the differentiation being between low risk/small schools (2 days) and higher risk/larger schools (5 days).

In the post-primary sector, standard inspections (typically five days) are performed of achievements and standards, quality of provision for learning, and leadership and management. They typically include a pre-inspection visit. Two or three subject departments are inspected and the inspection team includes subject specialists accordingly. There is no equivalent of a short inspection at the post-primary level. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, the post-primary model of inspection has been

revised with a stronger focus on the whole school rather than on individual departments. This was introduced in September 2013.

Indicators and performance evidence used in external school evaluation

Box 5.3 presents an overview of the key question and quality indicators used by the ETI in external school evaluation. These are also promoted in school self-evaluation via tools developed by the ETI to support schools (see above).

Box 5.3 Indicators used in key areas of external school evaluation

There are three main inspection domains: achievement and standards; the quality of provision for learning; and leadership and management. Each of these domains is broken down into key questions and quality indicators. For each indicator, an evaluation is made using one of six evaluative descriptors: Outstanding, Very good, Good, Satisfactory, Inadequate, Unsatisfactory.

An important domain is assessing achievement and standards. The Key Question here is: how well do learners develop and achieve? The more detailed questions are:

- Achievement: how far do learners achieve the highest possible standards of work and learning?

- Standards: how far do learners acquire and develop the dispositions, skills and capabilities for life-long learning and contribute to (or lay the foundations for their eventual contribution to) the community and the economy?

- Progression: how far do learners demonstrate progression within the school, building on their prior achievements, and preparing appropriately for the next phase of their learning?

- Fulfilling potential: how well do individual learners, at all levels of ability, surmount the barriers they may have to learning and achieve their potential?

To evaluate this, the ETI has at least three sets of quantitative data available:

1. pupil results on assessments developed by teachers (in post-primary education: teacher-developed tests for Cross-Curricular Skills);

2. pupil results on commercial tests chosen by schools to match their teaching and learning approach;

3. benchmarking data provided by the Department of Education (pupil performance at end of Key Stages, and on the GCSE and A-levels) categorised into bands of schools relating to the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

In addition to quantitative data, the ETI collects evidence (through direct observation, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work) relating to a range of qualitative indicators which include, but are not limited to: the quality of the pupils' engagement in and response in lessons; the range, extent and quality of the pupil's written work; the development of the pupils as young adults, including their skills and dispositions, thinking skills and personal capabilities; and their demonstration of leadership skills in both the formal and informal aspects of their learning and experiences.

Determining the overall effectiveness of schools and need for follow up

The ETI evaluates the "overall effectiveness" of a school, drawing on its evaluation of the school in the three domains (achievements and standards, learning and teaching;

and/or leadership and management). The ETI does not use a scoring system to evaluate a school's overall effectiveness. Rather, each inspection team reaches a professional consensus taking account of all available evidence, including its direct evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, in the context of its knowledge of the school. There are some procedures specified for deciding the actions following a school inspection, if follow up is required. The ETI only follows up schools in which it has identified a number of areas for improvement. These can be identified in any of the main inspection domains when provision is evaluated as "satisfactory", "inadequate" or "unsatisfactory". The more significant the identified areas for improvement, the sooner the ETI will return to monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these (18-24 months for "satisfactory" and 12-18 months for "unsatisfactory" or "inadequate"). Within that period, there will be one or more interim follow-up visits and the first of, at most, two follow-up inspections. If the ETI evaluates a school's safeguarding arrangements as unsatisfactory, it will re-inspect these within six weeks.

Accounting for school context in school inspection

The school context is an important part of school inspection. All individual school inspection reports include a descriptive overview of the school context. To evaluate the standard of pupil achievement in a school, the ETI uses a combination of benchmarked data and professional judgement to take account of the school's context.

In primary education, the inspection team examines the statutory assessment at the end of KS1 and KS2 benchmarked against all primary schools in Northern Ireland and also against schools in similar circumstances. During inspections, pupil achievement is evaluated via: lesson observations; conversations with pupils; an inspection of children's written work to note progress and challenges; and a verification of the assessment procedures. This is complemented with the ETI's knowledge of what is achievable in similar circumstances. With this combination of benchmarked data and professional judgement, the ETI team will consider and agree on the level of pupil achievements and standards at the school.

In post-primary education, the same evaluative procedure is followed. The ETI pays attention to the history of the school and especially to the nature of the intake to the school on a range of measures and to any change in school intake over time. There is also a professional judgement of the school's value-added by accounting for pupils' level of cognitive ability at intake (as indicated by the standards achieved at the end of KS2, together with any other assessment information schools may have, including from standardised tests) when examining their progress in achievements at the end of Years 10, 12 and 14, for schools offering post-16 programmes. When public examination results are compared they are compared to the average results for schools with a similar intake based on pupil entitlement to free school meals, as calculated by the Department of Education's Statistics and Research Team.

Frequency of inspection

Until September 2010, the ETI aimed to inspect each school at least once every seven years with more frequent inspection of a school being undertaken where it was deemed necessary. From 2010, the ETI is introducing a more proportionate and risk-based inspection strategy whereby the need for an inspection is identified by information from school performance indicators, risk factors (including the length of time since the last formal inspection), and from ongoing monitoring of schools by the District Inspectors.

For schools entering the Formal Intervention Process and/or receiving follow-up Inspections, more frequent visits are planned (see above).

Capacity for external school evaluation

The number of inspectors working for the ETI in 2011/12 was 62. This includes a system of District Inspectors (DI). The DI visits schools within a particular region independent from the formal inspection process. In this way they build local knowledge, keep abreast of school developments and are a key asset in implementing the new risk assessment model. For formal inspections, the composition of inspection teams varies depending on the sector, school size and focus of inspection:

- In primary education, an inspection team consists of a Reporting Inspector (RI), Deputy RI and other team members depending on the size of the school. Sometimes the District Inspector fulfils one of these roles. Depending on the number of teachers at the school, more inspectors are added, and if possible Associate Assessors.

- In post-primary inspections, the RI is usually supported by the deputy RI and together they explore issues associated with leadership and management and whole-school standards and outcomes. Two additional members of the team focus on cross cutting themes such as pastoral care and safeguarding, the provision for supporting pupils with special educational needs and careers education advice, information and guidance. Two or three subject departments are also inspected in detail by subject specialists. The DI may fulfil one of these roles. An example of the inspection of mathematics can be found in the ETI report (2010) *Follow-up to Better Mathematics*. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, deployment now varies due to a greater focus on whole school evaluation.

Since 2004, the ETI's inspection teams have been complemented with principals or vice-principals who are released by their schools. These are known as "Associate Assessors" (AAs). In 2011/12 a new cohort of 100 AAs was trained. Each AA participates, as a full team member, in a small number of inspections annually, normally not more than two per year.

Reporting and use of results

School evaluation results

All inspection reports on individual schools, including from follow-up inspections, are published on the ETI website. An oral report is given at the end of the inspection and the school receives a draft of the written report for fact checking. The inspection report is published within six weeks of the inspection.

Comparative school performance measures

The Statistics and Research Team within the Department of Education produces school performance measures for post-primary schools on the basis of the data it receives from schools as part of the annual data collections (see Chapter 6). Schools use the C2k platform to report these results. The major comparative school performance measures are student qualifications at the age of 16 on General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) or equivalent qualifications; and at the typical age of 18 on General Certificate of Education Advanced level (A Levels) or equivalent qualifications. Such qualifications

are recognised throughout the United Kingdom within the national qualifications framework and have currency for pupils in terms of access to further and higher education and/or the labour market.

The Department of Education uses these measures to promote school improvement. For example, the *Count, Read: Succeed* (DENI, 2011) strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy includes targets for the percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs with grades A* to C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics[9].

In addition to publishing system level performance data[10] with presentations of trends and breakdowns by gender, school type (grammar vs. non-selective post-primary schools) and pupil entitlement to free school meals (see Chapter 6), the Department of Education publishes individual school results on the Schools+ database. Users can find information for an individual school, including performance measures (key stage results and/or GCSE, A level or equivalent qualifications, as appropriate) as well as contextual information such as student enrolment, number of pupils with special educational needs, number of full time equivalents of teachers, religion and ethnicity of pupils, and finance. [11]

Unofficial school league tables

Although the Department of Education sets benchmarks for school performance, the official policy is not to publish "league tables" showing school average performance on comparable student performance measures. The official position is that these do not provide a valid basis for comparing performance between schools as they take no account of school intake or any other factors that may affect school performance. However, the United Kingdom's Freedom of Information Act means that the public has the right to ask for centrally collected and held data. Accordingly, the press can request data from the Department of Education and typically produce league tables from these data. For example, the Belfast Telegraph publishes league tables including average results for all post-primary schools and the average for Northern Ireland[12]. The table also specifies whether a school is academically selective or not ("grammar" or "non-grammar").

Strengths

Official policy supports and promotes effective self-evaluation

The school development plan (SDP) has been a legal requirement since 1998. However, the revision in 2010 has strengthened the role for self-evaluation with clear specifications of the areas to be covered and an expectation that evaluation is underpinned by performance and other data. Among other things, this was based on evidence from school inspections that identified well developed self-evaluation as a strength in the school development planning process (DENI, 2010). The SDP is positioned as an action document. It is tied into annual action plans and concrete targets and there is an expectation that schools will adapt their SDP to incorporate any inspection findings within six months of the inspection taking place. The ETI expects the 2010 SDP requirements will contribute to schools further developing their self-evaluation capacity. In schools at the leading edge of self-evaluation practices, the SDP is a powerful instrument.

Schools should make a copy of the SDP available to parents, as well as submitting a copy to each member of the BoG and staff. Schools are encouraged to engage parents and

their local community in their improvement plans and the BoG has to document in its annual report the steps it has taken to develop links with the community (DENI, 2010). This seeks to strengthen horizontal accountability.

In addition, the approach to school self-evaluation is examined as part of the inspection process. Each individual school inspection report includes information and an evaluative judgement in three major areas. A review of randomly selected individual school inspection reports shows that "leadership and management" includes information on the school development planning process, the priorities set, whether and how criteria are set and measured, the use of data among school staff, and the quality of action planning. It also includes comments on the effectiveness of governance, including the challenge and support function played by the BoG. The Department of Education's recent decision to send data packs directly to the BoG also aims to support the BoG challenge and support function as part of the school self-evaluation process.

Findings from the OECD review support a more prominent role for school self-evaluation and its strong potential for school improvement. In particular, the Department of Education's approach to both clarify expectations of the self-evaluation role within the school development planning process, and to raise the role of self-evaluation activities and results in the external evaluation process is expected to promote a more effective self-evaluation culture in schools. The vast majority of OECD countries have legal requirements in place for schools to conduct self-evaluation, but these vary significantly in nature and may not explicitly mention self-evaluation, but rather be positioned within strategic or development planning cycles (OECD, 2013). However, the setting of strategic or development planning requirements may not be adequate to stimulate an effective self-evaluation culture in all schools and school capacity to undertake self-evaluation varies enormously within many OECD countries. Findings from an ongoing research project on approaches to external school evaluation in six European systems lend support to the Department of Education's policy approach (Ehren et al., 2013): the processes stressed in external evaluation, such as school self-evaluation, transformational leadership and collaborative staff activities, are important and effective levers for school improvement actions; the expectations set in external school evaluation and stakeholder sensitivity to the results of external school evaluation are significantly related to schools improving their self-evaluation processes; and schools that are improving see systematic self-evaluation as a vital development strategy.

The ETI's tools can promote a common evaluation language and a more evaluative approach to self-evaluation

On a continuing basis, schools are expected to undertake some form of self-evaluation on the quality of provision, standards and outcomes, and leadership and management. The ETI has developed a self-evaluation framework, *Together Towards Improvement* (TTI) (ETI, 2013), and subject specific support documentation. These include quality indicators for schools to use in self-evaluation and a clarification of the framework used in external school evaluation. This promotes a common language for school evaluation and a shared understanding of factors related to school quality. Both New Zealand (Nusche et al., 2012) and Scotland (OECD, 2013) attach a great deal of importance to ensuring that school self-evaluation and external school evaluation use the same language. Both systems provide schools with supporting self-evaluation tools that are built on the criteria used in the external school evaluation framework. In Scotland, these are widely used by schools, including most independent schools. Livingston and McCall (2005) argue that such an approach means "teachers are more likely to see

external inspection in a developmental perspective rather than a judgemental one". In Northern Ireland, good use of the ETI developed or similar supporting tools is one aspect identified through school inspections as underpinning more effective school development planning processes (DENI, 2010). Fewer than 10% of respondents in an independent survey administered to schools that had been inspected in 2011/12 reported that they had not used TTI and 90% reported it is quite or very useful (ETI, 2012d).

Schools are familiar with the evaluation rating used by the ETI in external evaluation. These are, for example, included in an annex to the school development planning guidelines. At the time of the OECD review visit, for primary schools, the ETI provided a self-evaluation pro-forma that schools could complete before a short inspection. This school self-evaluation pro-forma aimed to help the school perform an internal audit and thus provide an interface for the school self-evaluation and the inspection visit to the school. The pro-forma sought the school's evaluation, with supporting evidence, in the three key areas and related indicators in TTI. This may have prompted some schools to make use of more specific criteria in their self-evaluation activities.

Well established and tailored support to schools to promote the use of data in self-evaluation activities

A generally strong infrastructure of national or local support for self-evaluation as a process has been identified as an important element in ensuring effective self-evaluation practices (SICI, 2003). In Northern Ireland there is well-established support to schools to promote the use of data in self-evaluation activities.

All schools are provided with a centrally developed information management and analysis system (the School Information Management System, including the Assessment Manager facility, provided by C2k). Schools can use this software to store individual pupil results from an array of different assessments used at the school (see also Chapter 3). Schools can also use this in a more quantitative way to monitor progress at the school or class level against targets set in the school development plan. This is user friendly and a great support for school self-evaluation as it gives schools considerable flexibility in uploading all types of information from continuous assessments to summative assessments. Some schools make use of this analytical software to monitor outcomes and learning progress throughout the school, by uploading results from commercial tests that pupils sit upon entry to the school and at subsequent stages during their time in the school (see also Chapter 3). Further, schools can use this to generate information for the ETI and as such, it is a helpful intersection between schools and the ETI during school inspections.

For the past 10 years, schools have received a benchmarking and target setting data package from the Department of Education. This is in addition to the publication of a series of statistical bulletins during each school year presenting system-level aggregate benchmark statistics (see Chapter 6). The tailored data package allows the school to compare itself to average data for Northern Ireland, and to situate its performance on key indicators in relation to absolute performance levels for all schools, and schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals. The Department of Education uses different bands on the FSME measure. More recently, the Department of Education decided to send out data packages directly to the BoG. This aims to further stimulate their role in self-evaluation activities and, where applicable, to support their responsibility in school principal appraisal.

Many schools exhibit a high level and sophistication of self-evaluation activities

The Chief Inspector's report 2010-2012 (ETI, 2012c) shows growth in overall effectiveness of schools over four years. The document is not specific about the interventions that led to this improvement, but it seems reasonable to attribute this success to a combination of the government's targets and programmes, as well as support and reporting activities by the ELBs, the Regional Training Unit (RTU), the ETI and the CCEA. In a survey on school leadership, the ETI concluded that self-evaluation activities play an important role in school leadership. The OECD review team learned of examples where schools tie their self-evaluation activities in with the School Development Plan and the PRSD procedures. Many targets are broken down into very concrete action plans, at the level of course content (*e.g.* to be reviewed), assessments (*e.g.* to achieve targets) and pupils (*e.g.* to focus on specific groups of pupils). The ETI and the RTU have identified many schools with well-informed classroom observation arrangements linking into school self-evaluation processes[13].

The ETI has worked with colleagues in the RTU, C2k and the ELB Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) to help develop school principals' capacity to make better use of school performance data (ETI, 2012b). The OECD review team has seen good examples of such data use by principals, heads of department and teachers. As noted above, schools in Northern Ireland benefit from good supporting tools to aid data use. Schools can use these to: inform decisions on where to intervene and provide extra support or stimulation to pupils; identify where there is a need to raise achievement expectations (to instill a culture that there is always room for improvement, i.e. "no satisfaction - Cs"[14]); and construct more sophisticated analytical measures to assess progress at the school level, *e.g.* measures of added value.

External school evaluation is broad and based in quality assurance

The ETI has a broad and legitimised inspection framework. The framework not only covers outputs and teaching and learning processes, but also the quality of provision for learning, pastoral care and leadership and management. These broad areas are supported by international research on the characteristics of effective schools (OECD, 2013). In particular, the focus on leadership and management is coherent with the heightened importance of self-evaluation and a move to a more proportionate external evaluation approach (OECD, 2013). The framework is published and promoted for use by schools via the *Together Towards Improvement* tools (ETI, 2013). This is important as a lack of clarity of the criteria used in external school evaluation can undermine the external school evaluation process (Faubert, 2009). During the OECD review, nobody questioned the legitimacy of the inspection framework. The framework is flexible and responsive to needs (*e.g.* responding to the current need to boost school leadership capacities).

There are established quality assurance procedures in external school evaluation. There is an annual evaluation exercise conducted by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA) to seek feedback from members of institutions that have been inspected during that year. The ETI has been awarded the Customer Service Excellence Standard for the last eight years. This independent evaluation is another way to heighten the legitimacy of the ETI (Faubert, 2009). It can also provide valuable information for improving the ETI's capacity to conduct objective and impactful inspections (OECD, 2013). The ETI sets high expectations for its services and has devised a code of good conduct for inspectors fitting its mission and vision.[15] This document also contains the

values that the ETI cherishes, the conduct that is expected from schools, and a description of the quality assurance procedures.

The ETI uses a combination of training and common guidelines to maximise coherence in judgement among different inspectors. Inspectors and Associate Assessors are trained in: information on the principles of inspection; the procedures used in inspections, including observing, evaluating and recording, recording and grading; and the protocols and processes of inspection[16]. All inspectors use the guidelines that underpin the indicators for subjects or for whole-school aspects to aid the process of inspection and to ensure consistency. These indicators are accompanied by features of what may be considered as good practice and are further illustrated with more detailed guidance. These guidance documents are reviewed and updated regularly through subject panels, staff information and staff development programmes. Common approaches for a number of important areas such as child protection, and standard conclusions must be used for all inspection activity (DENI, 2013).

The principle of the use of evidence in school evaluation is well established

School inspection makes use of first-hand evidence via the collection of information from different stakeholders, an examination of pupils' work, and direct observation of the teaching and learning process. The ETI conducts interviews and issues confidential questionnaires to parents, teachers and other school staff to seek their views on the school's quality. These multiple perspectives help to increase objectivity in evaluation results. To evaluate the achievement and standards at the school, inspectors can draw on both standardised data and teacher professional assessments. Inspectors have access to publicly available performance data, like the Levels of Progression (LoP) at the Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (which are assessed by teachers) and the GCSE and A level qualification data (which are centrally set external assessments, typically with a major, if not 100%, component of external examination). Schools can also show inspectors assessment information held at the school level in the Assessment Manager. For primary schools, this may include results from the central computer-based assessments (NINA and NILA). However, the results are not benchmarked and are only made available to schools. This fits in with the student assessment policy to promote diagnostic and formative assessment. Also, many schools use commercial tests to provide baseline measures and assessment of pupil progress through the school years (see Chapter 3). Schools can use the Assessment Manager for data analysis in their self-evaluation and inspectors are able to observe to what extent and how schools do this. Finally, there is a clear expectation that school self-evaluation is evidence based: the regulations on the School Development Plan specify that schools should use performance and other data when evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies in key areas.

The ETI has mechanisms to build on and improve its working knowledge of schools

The ETI accesses schools on a regular basis and has mechanisms in place to build on and strengthen its working knowledge of what goes on in schools. This mirrors the situation in most countries with school inspectorates: inspectors can access all school types on a regular basis and can make evaluative comparisons based on a common inspection framework. During inspections, the ETI has access to school developed assessment and evaluation information and can make sophisticated use of this evidence. The ETI also has a mechanism to learn from school leadership and senior educators. The OECD review team highlights the engagement of "Associate Assessors" (AAs) to join

school inspection teams as an excellent mechanism to bring in up-to-date experience from schools (Box 5.4). AAs are senior staff from schools, normally principals, vice principals or senior teachers. This works as a mutually beneficial professional development exercise: it brings up-to-date practical knowledge from the field into the ETI and also serves as useful training in evaluation techniques for participating AAs. During specific professional development days, the ETI shows AAs how to undertake classroom observation and what to look for in evidence (ETI, n.d.).

The ETI uses a system of District Inspectors that ensures a more regular contact with schools independent from the formal inspection cycle. This system appears to be appreciated by schools and can provide timely qualitative feedback on potential quality concerns. As such, the District Inspector system is a useful tool to assess risks to school quality.

Box 5.4 Recruiting senior educators to join external school evaluation teams

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) recruits "associate assessors" from among senior staff in schools (*e.g.* school principals, vice principals or senior teachers) to participate in the external evaluation of individual schools. The ETI recruits associate assessors via public advertisement and an interview process. Selected individuals join a pool of associate assessors and can be invited to join an external school evaluation team on an individual school inspection. Normally an individual will not be involved in more than two external school evaluations each year. Associate assessors receive training from the ETI and are introduced to the procedures and performance indicators used in external school evaluation.

This strategy has two objectives: first, it is hoped that the experience of involvement in assessing quality in another educational establishment will help to develop the individual's capacity to monitor, evaluate and improve the provision in his/her own school; second, the presence in the team of someone coming directly from the school context adds a dimension which can help to strengthen the ETI's awareness of the current perspective of schools.

Classroom observation is a core part of school evaluation

The observation of the quality of learning and teaching is an important part of the external school evaluation process. The ETI conducts classroom observations in all types of school inspections, including the follow-up inspections. This signals the importance of classroom observation in evaluation activities and is promoted more widely among school principals via their participation in the inspection process as associate assessors (see Box 5.4), who receive specific training in classroom observation techniques. The analysis of a random selection of inspection reports on individual schools show comments on the school's monitoring and evaluation processes, including classroom observation, as part of the inspection of "Leadership and management". Inspections also generate feedback on the quality of teaching and learning more generally. This underlines and promotes the importance of classroom observation as part of school self-evaluation activities. Although the ETI does not verify the results or processes of the school's PRSD scheme, these are expected to be linked to school development planning processes and include the observation of teaching as part of the monitoring phase (see Chapter 4).

External school evaluation emphasises the school improvement function

The Department of Education emphasises that improvement belongs to the school, as reflected in the key departmental policy for school improvement (ESaGS). The ETI

mission statement is "Promoting improvement in the interest of all learners". The OECD review team learned that the ETI makes it clear to AAs that inspection is about helping schools on their journey to improvement. Formal school inspections identify areas for improvement and it is expected that schools address these. Inspection reports on individual schools include reference to areas for improvement in the conclusion to the report. Analysis of a random selection of inspection reports shows that this reporting has become more explicit and detailed since 2012.

Inspections generate feedback for improving the teaching and learning process. During formal inspections, inspectors give oral feedback to teachers whose lessons have been observed, and individual school inspection reports at the post-primary level may include annexed reports on special areas of focus, *e.g.* the English Department, History Department, etc. (Although with the revised model of post-primary inspection, individual subject departments will no longer be inspected). Inspectors also give oral reports to school leadership on the results of surveys administered to parents, teachers and other staff. The District Inspectors can monitor and comment on the quality of the school's self-evaluation process, which can provide timely feedback for improvement.

The ESaGS policy has introduced a Formal Intervention Process as part of external school evaluation.[17] Recognising that schools are responsible for their improvement, follow up is based on the School Development Plan and the areas for improvement identified at the original inspection (DENI, 2009). The ETI has an improvement conversation with the school based on this. There is evidence that this follow-up mechanism is making a difference as the majority of primary schools entering the Formal Intervention Process are improving, although there is less improvement seen in post-primary schools (see Chapter 1). The OECD review revealed examples of schools that had demonstrated improvement as a result and that had recognised the process – although difficult and clearly potentially damaging for the school's reputation – as one of professional development and improvement for the school.

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have identified the use of a follow-up mechanism in external school evaluation as a way to improve the impact of external school evaluation (OECD, 2013). Several systems have recently introduced a policy to better target school evaluation to schools with identified need of improvement. There is evidence in Korea and the Netherlands that such targeted focus and/or follow up is an effective way of improving the impact of external evaluation and both systems have seen improvements in many of the targeted schools (OECD, 2013).

Alignment between the instruments for school self-evaluation and external school evaluation

A key recommendation from the OECD review is to align external school evaluation with school self-evaluation (OECD, 2013). From an instrumental perspective, the procedures used in self-evaluation and external school evaluation are well aligned in Northern Ireland. School evaluation policies promote a systematic linkage between the instruments for external evaluation and self-evaluation. Although there are subtle substantive differences, procedures are broadly coherent because they have been developed in reference to each other. A key instrument promoting alignment is the benchmarking data prepared by the Department of Education. Individual and tailored data sets are sent to each school and can be used in self-evaluation. They are also shared with the ETI as an important evidence base for external evaluation. The ETI has developed self-evaluation tools that correspond to the inspection framework and can be used by

schools. Regardless of the chosen tools for self-evaluation, during the external school evaluation process the ETI examines the school development planning process, including the school's action plan and the school's self-evaluation process. In this way, the key instruments for school self-evaluation feed into school inspection.

Challenges

Variability in self-evaluation capacity among school leadership and the BoG

The Department of Education's ESaGS policy recognises that the school and its BoG are accountable for the standard of pupil achievement at the school (DENI, 2009). The legal responsibility for the School Development Plan ultimately lies with the BoG, although this is a group of volunteers and there is no guarantee that the members have evaluation expertise. It is expected that the BoG plays the role of critical friend to the school. Typically, the responsibility for conducting and leading the self-evaluation process is delegated to the school principal.

Evidence from external school evaluations indicates that the capacity for school self-evaluation varies among schools. Schools may have varying structures in place to support self-evaluation activities, including some with clear roles and responsibilities among staff and others where this remains among the school leadership. The ETI points to capacity concerns among school principals (and also Boards of Governors) and that school self-evaluation is often not conducted in the most effective way. The ETI has recommended that schools develop more concise and incisive self-evaluation reports (ETI, 2012c). School reports on their results and progress towards targets set in the School Development Plan can be very broad, containing lots of information and several action plans, including new action plans following evaluation. Most reports do not show at a glance what the status of a school is and where it stands in relation to its SDP targets. In addition, the fact that the Board of Governors comprises a group of volunteers poses a challenge for the ETI, with a need to strike a careful balance in "inspecting" the BoG's role in self-evaluation.

For many years, the ELBs have delivered training in self-evaluation approaches to school principals and BoGs. The impact of such training has not been evaluated, but the most recent Chief Inspector's Report (2010-12) highlighted that the quality of leadership and management is still not good enough in 39% of post-primary schools, 22% of primary schools and 30% of pre-school settings (ETI, 2012c). It is also evident, based on the ETI's reports extending back at least ten years that shortcomings in leadership have been remarkably persistent. In a special report on school principal's leadership capacity, a relationship has been sought between school leadership quality as measured through the TTI quality indicators and school principal qualifications acquired through training. The conclusion was that none of the training methods clearly contributed to better school leadership. Therefore, there needs to be a stronger focus on school principals and the leadership team being equipped with the skills to address significant underachievement in a school. There is a clear call for better leadership of self-evaluation processes, and: "The development of the inherent capacity for leadership within the school workforce requires the development of broader leadership capabilities including a robust, 'no excuses' approach to self-evaluation for improvement." (ETI, 2013).

Implementing a new inspection approach and clarifying different roles for inspectors

School inspection in Northern Ireland is going through a significant transition period. The established approach to school inspection has been to conduct quite intense and comprehensive evaluations at each inspected school. In schools with highly developed self-evaluation activities, this is inefficient as it doubles up on internal evaluation processes. The OECD review team gained the impression that the established approach and inspection cycle was not tenable. In this context, it is understandable that the ETI is starting to implement a risk-based approach to planning its resources for annual school inspections. However, the introduction of such an approach is not without challenges.

In 2010, the ETI introduced a risk-based model of inspection for schools. The planned reduction in the percentage of schools inspected in regular inspection activities, excluding follow-up inspections (FUI) is shown in Table 5.1. (The annual business plan for 2013/14 is not yet available, so data are presented for 2011/12 and 2012/13). The idea is to target 40% of regular inspection activity at schools considered to be at higher risk than others. The OECD review team notes the potential tension on the ETI's capacity to conduct inspections in schools, given its other inspection responsibilities and the potential for increased inspection demands in early childhood and other institutions.[18]

Table 5.1 Number of inspections conducted (2011/12) and planned (2012/13)

Sector	Inspections completed in 2011/12	FUI completed over past 12-24 months (2011/12)	Total inspections completed in 2011/12, including FUI	Total number of schools (2011/12)	Number of planned inspections 2012/13	Number of planned FUI 2012/13	% of schools inspected in 2011/12, excluding FUI	% of planned inspections in 2012/13, excluding FUI
Preprimary	89	20	109	478	105	11	18.6%	22.0%
Primary	128	36	164	854	117	27	15.0%	13.7%
Post-primary	29	12	41	216	26	18	13.4%	12.0%
Other	25	15	40	--	82	14	--	--
Total:	271	83	350	--	330	70	--	--

Source: ETI (2012b), Inspection Leading to Improvement: Business Year 2010-2011, ETI, Bangor.

During the OECD review, some stakeholders noted that the frequency of formal school inspections (before the introduction of the new risk-based approach) had been quite low. The planned regular inspections in 2012/13 (14% of primary schools and 12% of post-primary schools) indicates a regular cycle in which each school is visited once every seven years (Table 5.1). In the case of a long period without an external school evaluation, it can be argued that schools have no vision of what is expected of them, and that the accountability culture is not adequate. The OECD review team learned that some schools would prefer a more regular visit from the ETI in order to provide more timely feedback on potential areas of improvement. The rationale being that the longer processes at the school level go on in an inefficient way, the more challenging and difficult it is for schools to address these; and that this may avoid overly negative evaluations from the ETI that could potentially damage the school's reputation. Although formal school

inspections are supplemented by regular visits from the District Inspector, these appear to be low profile and there may be confusion as to how visits from a DI differ to that of inspectors during a formal inspection, especially when these include classroom observations. There is a risk that this confusion may grow as the risk-based approach is introduced. The DI can be a key resource for the ETI to keep in contact with schools and to assess risks among schools in the district.

Demands on the ETI to conduct survey inspections to provide information at the system level may also place tension on resources for the regular inspection cycle.

Mitigating school and educator sensitivities regarding the Formal Intervention Process

It is clear that the Formal Intervention Process is stimulating improvement in many of the schools entering the process, which should mean that children experience important improvements in their schooling. However, the identification of schools in need of improvement is a difficult and delicate process. During the public consultation on ESaGS, some respondents raised concerns that there was "too much focus on measurement, labelling and ultimate threat of closure" (p.68, ESaGS) and the OECD review team heard some stakeholders raise similar concerns during the review, especially around the nature of communicating with schools and fears of media reports on schools during this process.

The OECD review team's impression was that much of these concerns related to a lack of adequate support offered to schools, as the ESA has yet to be established, but the ELBs' CASS support capacity had been significantly reduced (i.e. a delay in implementing the support function). The outlined policy for formal intervention envisages a key role for the proposed ESA (DENI, 2009, Annex C): "ESA and school governors and management develop and implement actions to effect improvement". At the time of the OECD review visit, it was unclear what form future support services would take as the Curriculum Advisory Support Services (CASS) of the five Education and Library Boards had been significantly reduced over recent years in the build-up to establishing the proposed Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

With the publication of the ESaGS policy ensuring an important level of transparency in the new procedures, the OECD review team gained the impression that the Department of Education could further clarify concrete details of how the follow-up inspections within the formal intervention process take place at the school level. It can be expected that this is a particularly challenging time for a school and that clarity of procedures is of crucial importance in communicating with the school staff, students, their parents and the wider school community. For example, how should the school leadership discuss results with each of these important stakeholders? Such concerns can add to potentially high stress levels for school principals and their staff.

A need to further develop the ETI's capacity for risk-based analysis

School inspection makes good use of data and professional judgement. Currently, the ETI receives data from the C2k system and from other parts of the Department of Education. Summative student assessment data are available at the end of each key stage. KS 1, 2 and 3: teacher assessments of pupils against the Levels of progression; KS4: the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and equivalent qualifications; post-16 non-compulsory provision: the GCE Advanced level (A levels) and equivalent qualifications. However, the ETI does not conduct original calculations and with this model it is restricted in its ability to move fully to a risk-based assessment system. The

ETI does not have an established data analysis function. Building capacity to perform this function would increase even further the ETI's credibility by demonstrating that the analysis of data is important. As indicated above, the District Inspectors can feed back information on potential risks to school quality; the challenge is finding a way to feed DI information more systematically into the ETI's risk assessment processes.

Accounting for school context when evaluating performance

The OECD review team notes that the Department of Education has various challenges in reporting on the role of school context in evaluating school performance. The Department of Education publishes performance information for individual schools in the Schools+ database. Users accessing this website can read the caution that the information contained in the tables does not provide a valid basis for comparing performance between schools, since it does not account for school intake or any other factors that may affect pupil performance. Indeed, performance tables based solely on "raw" student test results essentially measure the quality of the school intake rather than the teaching in the school (Willms, 1997; Hoyle and Robinson, 2003 in Rosenkvist, 2010) and are poor measures of school performance (OECD, 2008). While the caveat on the Schools+ Database is helpful, this approach demands a high level of expertise and judgement in comparing schools that are more or less similar.

At the same time, the press publishes unofficial school league tables and this accentuates the "market" aspect in post-primary education by influencing how parents choose their child's school. Newspapers aim to present information on the quality of individual schools in a transparent fashion, typically by showing all schools ranked from "high" to "low" on a particular indicator. The major example found by the OECD review team is the league table published by the Belfast Telegraph, using the government's benchmark of five GCSEs (including equivalents) including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics at grades A* to C. When releasing results to the media, the Department of Education includes interpretational caveats. In the case of the Belfast Telegraph article these are reported, but remain rather abstract to the reader.[19] This may lead to misinterpretation of school performance rankings that are damaging to equity and create incentives for schools not to accept pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic background with a less academic profile or with special educational needs (Faubert, 2009). In this context, concerns on the lack of a transparent and common contextual value-added measure for Northern Ireland have been flagged in the ESaGS policy (DENI, 2009).[20]

However, this also poses a challenge for school inspection. While the ETI accounts for school context in evaluating a school, the lack of common objective measures heightens demands on professional judgement. The availability of information to judge "value added" will vary from school to school. While there is a high degree of transparency in individual school inspection reports on the school context, it is less clear how the ETI accounts for school context in making judgements across schools and sectors. Analysis of a random selection of individual school inspection reports shows that the ETI has tried to emphasise school context in more explicit and consistent ways:

- Since 2011 these have included benchmark information on achievement in "similar schools" at the post-primary level. Some inspection reports include the definition for similar schools as those in the same free school meal entitlement category, as defined by the Department of Education. The majority of reports analysed include a table of achievement presenting the school's results and

including rows of information for similar schools with a comparative descriptor, i.e. "in line with average", "above average" etc. A minority presented the actual average achievement results for similar schools. Only a few of the random sample specified which free school meal entitlement category the school belonged to.

- It is of note that from 2013, individual school inspection reports at the post-primary level include much more detailed information on school context, including on achievement at intake for Year 8 pupils (% with Level 5 and above in English; % with Level 5 and above in mathematics; % with Level 4 and above in English; % with Level 4 and above in mathematics). Some of these also include information on special educational needs, if relevant.

- Reports at the primary level include short descriptive paragraphs on the school context. Evaluative text on achievements and standards includes reference to how the key stage assessments compare to the average in all primary schools, but statistical tables in the annex do not include comparative average figures for achievement or for proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals or with special educational needs.

At the same time, the Schools+ Database presents information on examination achievements for individual schools, including benchmarks for selective or non-selective schools (grammar average and non-grammar average, respectively), but not for "similar schools" as measured by pupil entitlement to free school meals.

Policy options

In general, school evaluation is a well-developed component of the Evaluation and Assessment framework in Northern Ireland. Building on these existing strengths and the identified challenges, the OECD review team suggests a few refinements. These policy options seek to increase alignment and to strengthen the implementation of the core school improvement policy:

- keep the focus on improvement and go further in linking school inspection with self-evaluation capacity;

- ensure a healthy balance between external challenge and support to schools;

- identify best aspects of existing training for school leadership and upscale;

- promote the use of professional standards in school principal appraisal;

- develop guidance materials and specific training for Boards of Governors;

- promote the importance of plurality of perspectives in school self-evaluation;

- strengthen capacity for risk-based assessment within the ETI;

- further clarify the role of school context in evaluating school performance.

Keep the focus on improvement and go further in linking school inspection with self-evaluation capacity

A major recommendation from the OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education is to adapt external school evaluation to reflect the maturity of the school evaluation culture. The OECD recognises that different systems are at different starting points and that moving to a differentiated external school evaluation approach requires a

high level of intelligence about school characteristics and performance. The OECD recommends that systems only move to such an approach once the evaluation culture is consolidated, evaluation capacity in schools is satisfactory, and data gathering and analysis within the school evaluation framework is established (OECD, 2013). Northern Ireland is a system that meets such requirements: there are well-established systems for data collection that can feed into school evaluation at both the central and school levels; many schools exhibit a high level and sophistication of self-evaluation activities; the ETI has helped to build school leadership capacity in classroom observation and self-evaluation activities via its engagement of associate assessors; and as part of the inspection process the ETI directly assesses a school's self-evaluation processes and how these are used to manage and improve school quality. Therefore, there is a good evidence base for introducing a more proportionate approach to school inspections.

Many OECD systems have recently introduced or are moving to a more proportionate approach to external school evaluation. This often is in tandem with a more prominent role for school self-evaluation in the external evaluation process and aims to take into consideration the "health" of each school (a risk assessment). As in Northern Ireland, New Zealand is a system that emphasises the school improvement function within external school evaluation. It recognises the importance of school self-evaluation capacity in bringing about and sustaining school improvement and the school's self-evaluation capacity (self-review) is a core factor in determining the length of the external school evaluation cycle, i.e. the length of time between external reviews to a specific school: four to five years for schools with strong performance and a school-wide culture of rigorous critical reflection and self-review that is contributing to sustaining this performance and continuous improvement; every three years for schools performing well and showing evidence of critical reflection and established processes for conducting and using self-review (the majority of schools); and an ongoing review process over a one to two year period for schools experiencing difficulty. Like the Formal Intervention Process in Northern Ireland, this aims to develop school capacity for self-review. The ongoing review period may be shortened if schools show evidence of self-review practices that are helping to lift student achievement. Among the OECD review systems, New Zealand comes closest to a collaborative school evaluation model (Box 5.5). Most European systems have some mix of a parallel model (where the school has its own system of self-evaluation and the inspectorate uses a different system) and a sequential model (where inspectorates follow on from the school's self-evaluation) (OECD, 2013). Feedback from schools in New Zealand indicates that they perceive external evaluation as a way to validate and where necessary improve their own evaluation and development processes (Wylie, 2009).

Box 5.5 New Zealand: School evaluation with a focus on improvement and collaboration

In New Zealand, external review is designed as a cycle, a recurrent process of visits and revisits to schools to assure quality, to sustain improvement and to intervene where necessary to address weaknesses and support improvement strategies. External review has elements of a collaborative school evaluation model, incorporating at the same time a sequential model where schools conduct their own internal review followed by a visit of the external team from the Education Review Office (ERO).

New Zealand's approach is collaborative in the sense that the ERO and schools attempt to work together to agree on a rounded picture of the school in which there is mutual recognition of its strengths and consensus on areas for development. "Building a picture of the school", according to ERO staff, relies on an integration of school self-review and external review, taking the most useful aspects from both. The choice of success criteria, indicators and evaluative questions, provide the framework and tools for the creation of a collaborative portrait.

Its collaborative intent is exemplified in the various steps of the review cycle. The first step is for the ERO team to meet with the Board of Trustees and the senior leadership team to design and agree on the shape of what will take place during the visit. After the review there is a joint discussion with the aim of reaching agreement on findings. This strives to engage a genuine dialogue around the school review report, its accuracy and recommendations and is, apparently, generally successful in achieving that aim.

Essential to any collaborative model is a high level of trust on both sides. In New Zealand, there is clear evidence of goodwill on both sides and that the quality assurance model is seen by all as work in progress. This evaluation model is generally well regarded because it is seen as low in threat, does not provoke high anxiety, and is formative in intent. The outcomes of school reviews are widely deemed as both credible and useful for school development.

ERO works on the principle that schools' own self-review should be so embedded in its daily practice that the visit of an external body is neither disruptive nor unwelcome. The apparent receptivity of schools to external review does suggest that the earlier apprehension of "inspection" has been removed or at least attenuated. The generally positive response to reviews by school staff and teacher organisations may be explained by its non-threatening nature, its positive focus on good practice, its receptivity to the school's own efforts at improvement and its primarily formative character. Taken together, these factors predispose schools to take on board ERO's suggestions for change.

Source: Nusche, D., et al. (2012),*OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264116917-en

In Northern Ireland, the initial approach to introducing a more proportionate model of school inspection has been for the ETI to develop specific self-evaluation reporting tools. There are specific proforma developed for reporting the results of self-evaluation activities for regular inspections in primary and post-primary schools. Similarly, schools that enter the Formal Intervention Process are required to produce specific self-evaluation forms. This attempts to promote the importance of school self-evaluation as part of the school improvement process. It is important that the ETI evaluates the use of these specific forms and gathers feedback from schools on their experience in using such specific reporting tools. Findings from the OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education raise a note of caution on requiring schools to produce specific reports as part of self-evaluation, as it may hinder the development function of school self-

evaluation (OECD, 2013). This would support the decision subsequent to the OECD review visit to accept a school's own self-evaluation and not to require the completion of a pro forma.

Information from individual school inspections and also from the less formal visits from District Inspectors can help to document school's level of self-evaluation capacity, and this can be a key criterion as part of the risk assessment by the ETI. In this way, the ETI can officially recognise a school's capacity to assure its quality and undertake actions for improvement. In schools with ETI-recognised capacity for self-evaluation, the results and reports coming from school self-evaluation can substitute the ETI inspection process. This would aim to avoid a duplication of evaluation activities and the products of the school's self-evaluation (whatever the approach taken) would feed into the inspection process. A more serious validation of the school's self-evaluation results can lead to a reduction in the first-hand data collection from the ETI, notably via classroom observations.

An additional key criterion in the risk assessment can be the school's capacity to undertake end of key stage student assessment. This will be a way to better align the student assessment and school evaluation policies. The current moderation procedure managed by the CCEA can be used as a basis to accredit schools that have proven their capacity to undertake end of key stage assessment against the Levels of Progression (see Chapters 3 and 6). In the Netherlands, a similar accreditation system existed in vocational education and training. The quality of examinations offered is part of the inspection framework for vocational education and training. Up until recently, the examination quality was assured by an examinations accreditation body, but this has merged with the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. There may be room to extend the CCEA training in moderation procedures to members of the school leadership team to build capacity to assure the overall quality of student assessment in their school.

Ensure a healthy balance between external challenge and support to schools

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have highlighted the importance of ensuring a healthy balance between external challenge and support to schools. In Northern Ireland, both challenge and support functions are long established and the key school improvement policy envisages a balance in these functions, including support to the BoG in their ability to challenge and support their schools. While the Department of Education has the ability to challenge schools that are in most need of improvement through the Formal Intervention Process, at the time of the OECD review, the support function was in a state of flux with the winding down of the CASS support services to schools and the fact that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) had yet to be established.

The ETI carries out the challenge function and this avoids any potential confusion of the ETI's role. This is not to say that the ETI does not contribute to school improvement as external school evaluation stimulates schools to improve and to seek support where necessary, and there is evidence of improvement in many schools that have entered the Formal Intervention Process. External school evaluation allows the identification and dissemination of good practice throughout the school system, which can also feed into policy improvements at the system level (see Chapter 6).

Experiences in other OECD systems indicate that the identification of areas for improvement is not enough and underscore the importance of building school capacity to undertake improvement actions. Emerging results from research in six European systems

with school inspectorates points to the fact that a school's acceptance of feedback from external school evaluation does not necessarily lead to improvement actions (Ehren et al., 2013). Possible interpretations of this finding are that schools either resist recommendations from external evaluation or lack capacity to act on them. Evidence from the School Improvement Group in Ireland (established in 2008 to follow up schools identified during inspections as experiencing significant difficulty) indicates that schools differ in their response to targeted follow up and improvement is a lengthy process: a third have successfully exited the process; a third are showing significant improvements; and the remainder have persistent concerns or have recently entered the process (Irish Department for Education and Skills, 2012). Although a very different context to Northern Ireland, there is evidence from the United States that many schools identified as underperforming within test-based accountability systems fail to make significant improvement and that there has been insufficient attention paid to resourcing effective support services (OECD, 2013). In Canada, the implementation of school improvement policies has been particularly successful in Newfoundland and Labrador. Senior department officials attribute the effective implementation to the support system and capacity building available to schools (Fournier and Mildon, forthcoming; Sheppard, 1995).

The challenge from the ETI needs to be effectively balanced with an adequate offer of support to schools. An efficiency review identified significant differences in the relative value attributed by ELBs to CASS, as judged by the amount of core funding they allocated to these services (DENI and DFPNI, 2011). The proposed ESA will play a key role here and it represents a significant opportunity to harmonise and strengthen the support offered to schools by drawing on the extensive experience in the existing support bodies and identifying their most effective practices. Importantly, the ESA support should help the BoGs to effectively carry out their challenge and support functions.

Striking the right balance between the challenge and support function is not easy. Other OECD systems have introduced a certain amount of "external pressure" to push some schools to undertake improvement actions. The Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands offer examples of OECD systems that have done this via targeted school inspection. For example, in the Netherlands, a school with three consecutive years of insufficient student achievement levels is given the status of a "very weak school". In 2011, the period for schools to exit from the status "very weak school" was lowered from three to two years and there are plans to further reduce this to one year (Dutch Ministry of Education and Science, 2011 and 2013). Although such policies aim to avoid the unacceptable situation where children experience inadequate schooling for a number of years, the introduction of targeted interventions in certain schools brings with it the risks of stigma and reputation damage to schools. Importantly, both systems have implemented policy measures to ensure the support function. These seek to promote alignment between the challenge and support functions. At the same time there is recognition of the need to improve the quality of the support offered (Box 5.6).

Box 5.6 Challenge and support in the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands

Linking support to the school inspection process

In the Flemish Community of Belgium (Shewbridge et al, 2011) and the Netherlands (Scheerens et al, 2012), the principle of "freedom of education" means a high degree of autonomy for schools. However, the school evaluation policies targeting schools with serious quality concerns include measures to raise the pressure on these schools to seek support for school improvement.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, this balance is conceived as a "quality triangle": schools are legally responsible for their quality; Pedagogical Advisory Services offer support for school improvement (support services are offered by different umbrella organisations each representing a number of schools and governing boards associated along denominational or other lines); the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training sets student attainment standards and the Flemish Inspectorate of Education monitors school quality and signals schools with quality concerns (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). If the Flemish Inspectorate of Education judges that a school needs assistance to improve, the school is obliged to use external support from the relevant Pedagogical Advisory Service. At the other end of the spectrum, schools receiving a positive recommendation from the Flemish Inspectorate of Education are judged to be of sufficient quality and to have the necessary capacity to monitor and further improve their quality. It is of note that the Pedagogical Advisory Services are not unequivocally in agreement with the policy on mandatory support for schools receiving a negative recommendation from the Flemish Inspectorate of Education. An argument against it is that some schools would be obliged to leave their own path of development in favour of the quality aspects within the inspection framework.

In the Netherlands, all very weak schools seek support from a "Flying Brigade" organised within the PO-Council (the council for schools in primary education).[1] A school board with a very weak school can seek the (free) support of a group of advisors with an extensive amount of experience in counselling very weak schools. The focus of the advice is the indicators on which the Dutch Inspectorate of Education has judged the school to be insufficient and the support offer is tailor-made. However, a good degree of alignment is assured by established co-operation between the inspectorate and the taskforce that coordinates the Flying Brigade.

Reviewing the quality and nature of the support offer

Of equal importance, there is a more general offer of support to all schools both to prevent any deterioration in school quality and to promote further improvement and innovation. In the Netherlands, this support has been offered since the 1970s. Educational support was essentially organised along denominational lines. Since 2006, primary schools receive a lump sum containing a certain amount of funding for training and support. This means that schools are free to engage support from any supplier. Currently, schools can choose from denominational suppliers, private training companies and importantly, from the PO-Council which offers several lines of support (*e.g.* reading and arithmetic, running a governing board, avoiding "weak school" status, etc.). There have also been efforts to better tailor support to schools. In 2008 it was concluded that while there may be much support available to schools, it may not necessarily be founded on an empirical body of knowledge about what works in education (Scheerens et al, 2012). The 2008 Parliamentary Review of Educational Policy in the Netherlands[2] showed, that government decisions on innovations in education were not sufficiently informed by empirical knowledge.

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Box 5.6 Challenge and support in the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands *(continued)*

As such, in addition to fundamental research and policy-based research, research grants are also available for practice-based research (Satijn, 2012). This is one way to involve schools, training and support suppliers and research parties (universities, research organisations) in joint projects to deliver both the kind of support a school or group of schools wants, and to build knowledge of whether this type of support or approach really works.

1. For further information: www.poraad.nl/content/vliegende-brigade

2. For further information:

web.archive.org/web/20080405202650/http://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerleden/commissies/TCO/sub/index.jsp

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Identify best aspects of existing training for school leadership and upscale

With school self-evaluation at the core of school improvement, there are ever pressing needs to ensure adequate self-evaluation capacity among school leadership. The OECD review has revealed excellent examples of professional development for school leadership in Northern Ireland, notably the ETI's Associate Assessor programme that has been described as "the best professional development available" for principals and vice principals. There have also been concerted efforts to strengthen school principal training provision, although a recent evaluation indicates that some improvements could still be made. The ETI recommended that all providers of school leadership training cooperate together to identify the best features of each programme, a view consistent with the current trend of sharing education (ETI, 2013). The OECD review team endorses this recommendation, which should also be a matter of priority in redesigning support services in the ESA. There is room for a more active collaboration of the ETI in redesigning these services by promoting its specific training offered to associate assessors, notably the techniques for classroom observation.

Promote the use of professional standards in school principal appraisal

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have revealed that several systems that give prominence to the role of school leadership in school improvement have developed a set of professional standards for school leadership. This can bring the advantage of providing common reference criteria for all those undertaking the appraisal of school principals and other members of the leadership team. If well designed and implemented, professional standards for school leadership can help to clearly communicate realistic performance expectations for school leaders geared towards improving student outcomes (Pont et al., 2008). Only limited research has been undertaken on the ways in which the use of professional standards affects school leadership practices, school outcomes and school leader appraisal. While this highlights the importance of the capacity of those undertaking the appraisal, it does underline that professional standards can contribute to a fair, valid and reliable appraisal process (Kimball et al., 2009). If applied coherently, these ensure that all evaluators hold a shared conception of effective school leadership. A set of professional standards that clearly lay out what the best school leaders can achieve can help focus appraisal towards the

improvement of all school leaders, especially those that are already performing well, but could aim for excellence (Reeves, 2009).

In Northern Ireland, the Regional Training Unit developed a set of professional standards for school leaders in 2005 (RTU, 2005). However, similar to the OECD review team's findings for teacher appraisal (see Chapter 4), these do not appear to be used as a common reference for school leadership appraisal. The active use of school leader professional standards would be particularly helpful in the case of Northern Ireland where responsibility for school principal appraisal lies with the BoG. New Zealand is a system with a similar approach and in which external school review has revealed diversity in the capacity of the Boards of Trustees to support school evaluation (Nusche et al., 2012). The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the school sector developed an Educational Leadership Model in 2008 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008). Since that time, there have been two further publications that draw on the latest research and best practice models for specific leadership roles. The Ministry pays attention to reporting different case studies to make the major aspects of the Educational Leadership Model ever more concrete for school leaders and other stakeholders.[21] Other public school systems in different parts of Australia and Canada have developed professional standards in collaboration with education departments and school leadership professional bodies (OECD, 2013).

Develop guidance materials and specific training for Boards of Governors

The Board of Governors plays a key role in school evaluation in Northern Ireland. As is the case in other OECD systems, it is a challenge to build evaluation capacity at this level. The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education have revealed different approaches to stimulate the BoG role, including policies to send school inspection reports to school boards and not to schools (the Netherlands), and to appoint one member of the board as a training co-ordinator with a dedicated half hour at each meeting for a training session (Scotland). The Department of Education already supports the BoG in a number of ways. There are specific briefing documents prepared by the ETI for the BoG to prepare for school inspections. The BoG now also directly receives the central data held on schools. In this way, the BoG is aware of the information base available for both school self-evaluation and school inspections. It is envisaged within the ESaGS school improvement policy that the future ESA will support schools in their work on School Development Plans and will monitor the quality of these plans and the adequacy of the targets set by the school. In turn, the policy stipulates that schools and the BoG will be required to cooperate with the ESA on school improvement.

In going forward, the OECD review team underlines the importance of developing guidance materials and training for the BoG to support them in conducting their evaluation responsibilities. Already, the ETI individual inspection reports comment on the BoG under the evaluation of leadership and management. The ETI, therefore, has a body of knowledge to point to the BoG with effective evaluation models. These should feed into any guidance materials eventually developed by the ESA. A national programme of training for the BoG could help to build the necessary scaffolding for the BoG to challenge their school principals on the SDP and its targets. Given the voluntary nature of the BoG, there would need to be flexibility in when and how such training is offered. However, there is likely to be room to stimulate and engage professional exchanges among different BoG.

A central recommendation from the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education is that systems promote the appraisal of school leaders' competencies for monitoring, evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2013). One critical aspect of the BoG's responsibilities is to ensure that the professional development and performance of teachers is reviewed annually in accordance with the PRSD and SDP. This gets right to the heart of the evaluation process and as such it is critical that the BoG are aware of the importance that the school principal and the leadership team conduct classroom observation and provide developmental feedback to teachers. Indeed, it is expected that in addition to a review discussion, the BoG conducts task and classroom observations as part of the annual appraisal of school principals. These areas, therefore, seem to be the priority in designing specific training and supporting materials for the BoG. Part of school leader appraisal in the Atlantic provinces in Canada includes the collection of stakeholder views on the school principal's performance. This can include interviews and/or feedback questionnaires administered to parents, teachers and students (OECD, 2013).

Strengthen capacity for risk-based assessment within the ETI

The ETI underlines the importance of using a strong evidence base in external school evaluation – and also promotes the use of evidence in school self-evaluation via its inspection of school monitoring and evaluation processes. The use of data does not replace professional judgement. On the contrary, professional judgement pays a key role in external school evaluation. However, the analysis of data in inspection activities, coupled with well documented procedures on decision rules for professional evaluation, are key ways to strengthen the standardisation of external school evaluation.

Key data on school context and performance are used in the inspection process and published in the individual school inspection reports. There is established statistical capacity within the Department of Education and this provides key benchmarking data for the ETI and schools. Other data may also be compiled by universities or research agencies and this can feed into the ETI's evidence base. In this way, the ETI benefits from statistical and research capacity elsewhere. It also gathers data first hand when conducting inspections at school, and this forms an important part of the evidence base.

Going forward, the OECD review team sees a need to build data analysis capacity within the ETI. The introduction of a new risk-based approach to inspections heightens this need. It is crucial that the ETI is able to direct the analyses and develop new indicators in key areas, including on student performance and school self-evaluation capacity. Without doubling up on current data collection processes, there is an argument for bringing together all different strands of data and research into a common knowledge base. This will bring evidence into close relation with the ETI's working processes and allow the development of an integrated body of knowledge on school quality. This can also inform more efficiently the ETI's risk assessment.

With a stronger analytical function, the ETI can better adapt to changing emphases in external school evaluation policy. Initially, there are two areas in rolling out the new inspection approach: heightening the objectivity in judging school self-evaluation capacity, and more effectively assessing and identifying risks to school quality. This is an ongoing process of evaluating, adjusting and refining the knowledge base and analytical procedures behind risk assessment. The Dutch Inspectorate of Education is also trying to meet these challenges. It aims to better standardise risk assessment by combining data analysis using a growing knowledge base on school quality with explicit procedures for

making evaluative judgements. Such analytical procedures are periodically reviewed and are currently being updated (see Box 5.7).

Box 5.7 Developing and updating analytical capacity for risk assessment in the Netherlands

Risk analysis is split into two stages: primary detection and expert analysis. The primary detection phase comprises statistical analysis of all data to determine boundary values to discriminate between risk and no-risk (see Table 5.2). Means, standard deviations and percentiles are calculated for different indicators. This is the "mechanical" part of the analysis of possible risks. Data include: signals (complaints or questions from the public *e.g.* from parents, newspaper items, and observations made by inspectors during school visits); annual documents (annual accountability report, funding information, school guide); and student achievement (results of the standardised test at the end of primary education, results from school and national examinations in secondary education, value added calculations). Similar to the free school meal bands in Northern Ireland, student achievement data are classified into separate performance bands on the basis of level of disadvantage (mainly using parental educational level). In this way, the risk assessment takes account of school context. Where relevant, data are based on three year trends (see columns T-2, T-1 and T in Table 5.2). The primary statistical analysis helps to determine which school boards will need further attention in the second stage of risk assessment. As of 2013, the risk analysis has been extended to better meet the inspection approach and now includes data to assess governance, financial and quality risks. In turn, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education will perform more detailed analyses to determine: valid and meaningful boundary limits for indicators; the prospective power of indicators (to enable the inspectorate to identify potential risks, rather than just existing ones); and interrelationships between financial and quality indicators.

The expert analysis phase comprises expert interpretation of the broader picture of all risks within the remit of a certain school board. In this respect, the inspectorate's "memory" (i.e. records of quality, financial and governance data), as well as its experience comes into play. A team of inspectors judges the risk profile using agreed and specified decision rules. In the past, an important indicator was the school board's governance capacities and the inspection team had experience to judge the school board's ability to address shortcomings. This judgement, next to objectively calculated risks, led to a decision on whether there would be further enquiry or not. Table 5.2 shows details of the new set of indicators used for risk analysis and includes the draft "signalling values", that is, the agreed benchmarks used (sometimes tentatively) to signal a risk. Procedures for expert analysis are in the process of being updated.

Table 5.2. Pilot data sheet for primary risk detection in the Netherlands

Integrated Risk Analysis: Primary Education		Board number			Board name	
	Financial	*T-2*	*T-1*	*T*	*Signalling value (draft)*	*Yes/no risk*
F01	Profitability				Min 1 yr. = > 0%	
F02	Solvency				>0,40	
F03	Liquidity				>1,5	
F04	Dependency on other funding/income				=<1SD+av.	
F05	Financial buffer				>0%	
F06	Multiannual budget					
F10	Resistance capital				>10%	
F12	Turnover (sales volume)				<=€100 000	
F16	Financial arrangement				No	
	Pupils	*T-2*	*T-1*	*T*	*Signal*	
F07	Trends in pupil intake				Not extreme	
F08	Trends in regional pupil population				Around average	
	Governance		*T*		*Signal*	
B01	(Future) merger, transfer, break-up				No	
B02	Multisectoral?				No	
B03	Mean no. of students per school				>=100	
B04	% of small schools				<=30%	
B05	No. of schools				<=2SD+av.	
B06	No. of signals				None	
B07	Improvement period for shortcomings				None	
	Staff	*T-2*	*T-1*	*T*	*Signal*	
P01a	Cost of staff i.r.t. public funding				<=95%	
P02a	Cost of staff i.r.t. total benefits				<=90%	
P04	No. of pupils per teacher				<=1SD+av	
P05	Share of primary (teaching) staff				<1SD+av	
P06	Mean age teaching staff				<=1SD+av	
	Materials	*T-2*	*T-1*	*T*	*Signal*	
M01	Complete decentralisation					
M02a	Housing costs				<=10%	
M03a	Housing costs per pupil				<=1SD+av	
M04	Obsolescence inventory				>=30%	
	Quality		*T*		*Signal*	
K01c	Student achievement				No risk	
K06a	Educational quality				<=5% special intervention	
K06c	No. of pupils in schools with shortcomings					
K08	No. of compliance shortcomings				None	
K10a	No. of schools with disadvantaged pupils				None	
K16	No. of schools with insufficient quality assurance				None	

Further clarify the role of school context in evaluating school performance

The OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education identified different ways to address the concern about differences in school contextual characteristics. There is no perfect approach, but there are different approaches presenting different advantages.

In the simplest form, school performance measures may present actual student assessment or examination results, plus provide descriptive information on the school context, for example school-level information on the students that participated in the assessment or examination, *e.g.* their gender, socio-economic background, etc. Currently, the Schools+ Database presents school information in a set of distinct tables (address, enrolment, pupil, teacher, religion, ethnicity, key stage, finance). A simple improvement may be to present the key stage results together with details of number of pupils included and excluded in the measures and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, i.e. following the current reporting format of Examination achievements in the Schools+ Database. In both cases, it may be worth reporting further descriptive statistics, *e.g.* proportion of boys at the school, proportion of pupils with special educational needs.

Northern Ireland currently uses the free school meals entitlement measure as the major factor in accounting for school context during school inspections. Here, the OECD review team has identified simple ways to further clarify the procedures by: including clear information on which free school meal entitlement band the school is classified in, reporting more consistently the comparative performance information in school inspection reports, and updating information presented in the Schools+ Database to include comparative information on the free school meals entitlement measure. In going forward, the Department of Education should give consideration to how it can further strengthen reporting on equity, again by perhaps including comparative information on the proportion of boys and pupils with special educational needs at the school.

Some systems apply statistical adjustments to account for the school context's impact upon a specific set of student assessment or examination results, these are referred to as contextual attainment models (OECD, 2008). However, these do not take into consideration a student's prior attainment. It is important to be conceptually clear on this, as in several systems there is a misconception among stakeholders that such contextual adjustments are "value added models". Value added models compare student performance at a minimum of two different points in time and estimate the school's contribution to this (OECD, 2008). An example in Northern Ireland would be the comparison of pupil performance at end of Key Stage 1, with that at Key Stage 2, etc. Value added models may also account for school context and these are known as "contextual value added models".

Regarding adjustments to account for school context, this typically involves establishing a regression model to determine how different student characteristics and/or community factors relate to student achievement. For example: Sweden uses a weighted indicator on parents' education, the proportion of boys, the number of students born abroad, and the proportion of students born in Sweden but with both parents born abroad; and Australia uses parental education and occupation of individual students aggregated to the school level, and a set of school community factors (proportion of indigenous students, remoteness of the school and a measure of educational disadvantage for students with a language background other than English). In this way, Northern Ireland has a great deal of information available, including information on: school intake; enrolment; pupil attendance rates; proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals; proportion of pupils with special educational needs; number of newcomers; the size of the school and number of staff.

However, research has identified some concerns over the use of statistical models to adjust school performance measures (Rosenkvist, 2010). In a review of different statistical approaches for school performance measures, Masters (2012) concludes that

these will inevitably provide an imperfect picture of a school's effectiveness. One concern in more complicated statistical adjustment models is a level of obscurity that makes it difficult for users to meaningfully interpret results. Such complex models may be open to accusation of massaging the results to make these appear better (Grift, van de, 2009) or even to excuse low average performance (Figlio and Loeb, 2011) or to institutionalise low expectations (Hamilton and Koretz, 2002). One method to prevent these effects is to use a balanced set of indicators, for example, a combination of (relative) value added models with absolute achievement levels.

Such considerations are linked to system level reporting and necessitate careful research on the impact of different possible measures and/or adjustments. This is explored further in Chapter 6.

Notes

1.   Article 13(3) of the 1998 Education Order places a duty on Boards of Governors, through the scheme of management, to prepare, and periodically revise, a SDP. In doing so, Boards of Governors are required to consult the principal and consider any guidance provided by the Department, the Education and Library Boards and where applicable the Catholic maintained schools (CCMS), and also any inspection findings. The Education (School Development Planning) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 set out the detailed requirements relating to the preparation of SDPs and the matters they should include. The Regulations apply to all SDPs prepared after 24 January 2011. www.deni.gov.uk/index/curriculum-and-learningt-new/standards-and-school-improvements/03-schools_school_improvement_programme-school_development_planning_pg.htm .

2.   www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2010/395/schedule/made

3.   www.deni.gov.uk/sdp_guidance_2010_-_english_published_version_revised.pdf, p. 2

4.   The context and climate, therefore, that underlay the discussions during the OECD review was one of uncertainty of what form the new ESA would take and to what extent there would be an adequate school support offer.

5.   See Regulation 4, The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010: www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2010/395/schedule/made

6.   www.deni.gov.uk/sdp_guidance_2010_-_english_published_version_revised.pdf

7.   This is available at the following link: www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-primary/short-inspection-of-primary-schools-self-evaluation-proforma.htm

8.   C2k is partly financed by the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity structural fund. For more information, see: www.c2kni.org.uk/

9 .   Specifically, there are targets set for all pupils, as well as for three key sub-groups: boys; girls; and pupils entitled to free school meals. Further, pupils being educated in Irish medium schools must have five GCSEs graded A* to C (or equivalent) in English, mathematics and Gaeilge.

10.   For more information see:

www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/32_statistical_publications-indexofstatisticalpublications_pg/32_statistical_publications_pressreleases_pg/statistics_and_research_-_national_statistics_school_performance.htm

11.   The Schools+ Database, found at http://apps.deni.gov.uk/appinstitutes/instmain.aspx

12.   www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/grammar-schools-gcse-league-tables-for-northern-ireland-how-did-yours-fare-29180641.html

13.   For more information see:

www.rtuni.org/core%20studies/prsd/page.php?page_id=60http://www.rtuni.org/core%20studies/prsd/page.php?page_id=104

14.   An expression used in the Netherlands.

15   A Charter for inspection, www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-inspection/a-charter-for-inspection-4.pdf

16   www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-documents-required-for-inspection/associate-assessor-leaflet.pdf

17   Description of the Formal Intervention Process in Annex C of ESaGS: www.deni.gov.uk/esags_-_a_policy_for_school_improvement_april_2009.pdf.

18   However, these are beyond the scope of the OECD review.

19 .   The Belfast Telegraph article comments on whether this is a real indicator of school quality and notes other factors to consider when interpreting the league table results, including the impact of academic selection by some post-primary schools, other aspects of pupil enrolment, attendance and funding structures. Also, it states that school inspection reports can give a better indication of a school's achievements overall.

20 .   "The absence of an agreed set of quantitative and contextual value-added measures that would allow more meaningful comparison of performance within, across and between schools is also a weakness in current policy that needs to be addressed. Along with this comes the challenge of explaining to parents, pupils and the wider public the purpose of such measures in a way that brings clarity and makes sure that value-added outcomes cannot be misinterpreted or manipulated inappropriately or distort the work of schools. It is also important to be clear that the development of such measures would not mean a return to published league tables." (p.19, ESaGS).

21 .   For example, see "Leadership qualities" at www.educationalleaders.govt.nz.

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Chapter 6

System evaluation

The Department of Education operates within a system of accountability and needs to demonstrate progress towards specified targets set for the school system. The major approach to collecting evidence on the school system is via a system of annual data collection from schools. Pupil outcomes are important measures for system performance. At the post-primary level these are aggregated from pupil qualifications at the end of compulsory schooling and at the primary level from teacher assessments against national standards. From 2012/13, teachers assess pupils' cross-curricular skills against new learning standards (Levels of Progression), which are designed to provide valid measures against the Northern Ireland curriculum. To ensure reliability of the measures, a new moderation system is being introduced. Information from external school evaluation, research and international assessments also inform school system evaluation.

This chapter looks at system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework in Northern Ireland. System evaluation refers to approaches to monitor and evaluate the performance of local school systems, as well as the education system as a whole. The main aims of system evaluation are to provide accountability information to the public and to improve educational processes and outcomes.

Context and features

Goals for the school system

Goals are set for the school system at different levels. First, there are overall goals set by the government that frame general expectations and ambitions for the school system. The Programme for Government (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011) highlights key goals within two priority areas: growing the economy, and tackling disadvantage. These include specific targets for the school system: to increase the overall proportion of young people achieving the expected qualification level, as measured by those achieving five General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSEs) at A* to C or equivalent including English GCSE and Mathematics GCSE, and to increase qualification levels for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by the time they leave school. Second, these government-wide goals translate into two overarching goals for the Department of Education:

- *Raising standards for all* – through high quality teaching and learning, ensuring that all young people enjoy and do well in their education and that their progress is assessed and their attainment recognised, including through qualifications.

- *Closing the performance gap, increasing equity and equality* – addressing the underachievement that exists in the education system; ensuring that young people who face barriers or who are at risk of social exclusion are supported to achieve to their full potential; and ensuring that the education service is planned effectively on an area basis to provide pupils with full access to the curriculum and Entitlement Framework.

Third, there are specific goals and targets set within specific policies (for an example, see below).

Responsibilities for system evaluation

The Department of Education takes overall responsibility for education system evaluation. As outlined above, the Department of Education operates within a system of accountability and needs to demonstrate progress towards specified targets set for the school system. The Department is also responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of its policies. For example, the policy on literacy and numeracy (*Count, Read: Succeed*) specified the Department of Education's responsibility in monitoring the success of this strategy and progress towards the set targets (DENI, 2011, paragraph 3.15), the Department is responsible for:

- ensuring this strategy is clearly communicated to schools and other stakeholders;

- ensuring that there is a policy framework that supports improvement;

- setting literacy and numeracy targets for the performance of the education system and monitoring progress;

- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this strategy;

- accounting for the progress that the education sector makes towards achieving targets for literacy and numeracy.

The Department of Education is held to account on the progress of its policy implementation by the Education Committee at the Northern Ireland Assembly, which undertakes a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department and plays a key role in the consideration and development of legislation. As for all public services, the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee may also review or evaluate areas under the Department of Education's responsibility.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) within the Department of Education conducts external evaluations of schools on a cyclical basis. The ETI is responsible for reporting to the Department of Education and through it to the Assembly on general levels of school quality in Northern Ireland. It may conduct specific thematic evaluations in areas of policy priority. See Chapter 5 for an in depth presentation of the ETI's responsibility for the external evaluation of individual schools.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) contributes in various ways to system evaluation. The CCEA is responsible for continually reviewing all aspects of the curriculum, examinations, and assessment for publicly funded schools and for providing advice to the Department of Education in these areas. In relation to system evaluation, this means: reporting information on the curriculum and system-level results in assessments and examinations, conducting research and development, moderating relevant qualification and assessments, and undertaking public consultations on proposed legislation in these areas. The responsibility for moderation of national assessment is augmented in the new approach to compulsory teacher reporting on student achievement at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (see Box 6.1).

The Statistics and Research Team within the Department of Education compiles key data on the school system and reports indicators in a series of statistical press releases. The Statistics and Research Team is responsible for the validation and general quality control of centrally collected statistics and prepares reporting guidelines for schools to aid their task in completing annual statistical returns. As part of this, the Classroom 2000 (C2k) electronic platform has been developed. Schools make use of this for pupil assessment and school self-evaluation activities (see Chapters 3 and 5) and there are constant concerns to adapt this better to support school reporting needs.

Procedures to collect evidence on the education system

The major approach to collecting evidence on the education system is via a system of annual data collection from schools. Schools are asked to report aggregate and pupil level information in key areas of policy interest, including student outcomes at key stages and in the major examinations in Years 12 and 14. Other information is collected via external school evaluations, specific research activities and participation in international surveys.

There are three major groups of reference standards used for system evaluation:

1. Student learning objectives: For Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 these are enshrined in the Levels of Progression. Other OECD systems using learning progressions include Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway (OECD, 2013).

2. Inspection framework: The framework and quality indicators used in the external evaluation of schools (see Chapter 5 for more details).

3. Goals and targets set within specific policies.

Annual data collections

Schools complete a compliancy reporting exercise and return school data to the Department of Education. This includes key information on pupil enrolment including: number of pupils with different classifications of special educational needs; those entitled to free school meals; those who are newcomers; ethnic category (white, excluding Irish Travellers; other); religion (Protestant, Catholic, Other religion); number of teachers; and key stage performance information (see below). Pupil attendance data were collected for the first time in the 2008 census.

The Department of Education also collects performance information on an annual basis from post-primary schools. These collections are known as the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER) and the School Leavers Survey (SLS).[1] For the SAER, schools are expected to report information on the number of female, male and total pupils achieving specified performance indicators for Year 12 (i.e. achievements in GCSEs or equivalents) and Year 14 pupils (i.e. achievements in General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, "A Level" or equivalents). The SLS collects the qualifications and destinations of all pupils leaving mainstream post-primary schools receiving public funding (grant aided).

Regarding the GCSE data, schools are also requested to report information on individual pupils who are not included in the return and one of the following reasons for pupil ineligibility: death; serious illness or pregnancy; transfer to another school or emigration; pupil is in a special unit approved by the Department of Education; pupil has a statement of special educational needs; pupil has entered into a special scheme for behavioural reasons; serious welfare issues (with evidence that the school has taken significant steps to resolve these); and withdrawal from the school with parent/guardian consent.

School information systems

Each grant-aided (publicly funded) school in Northern Ireland has access to the Classroom 2000 (C2k) school reporting system. Not only is this the basis for annual compliancy reporting to the Department of Education, but it can be used by schools for self-evaluation activities. School information in C2k forms a critical information base for external school evaluations. For example, during post-primary inspections, inspectors can have access to data on: attendance; suspension/expulsions; social deprivation; headline examination performance; individual subject performance; and performance of individual classes in subject examinations (see Chapter 5).

Student performance information from national assessments

Performance at primary level

Although central computer-based assessments are offered to primary schools, pupil results in these tests are not collected centrally and do not feed into system evaluation. However, aggregate information is collected directly from schools on how their students perform at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, and this is further aggregated to provide measures at the system level. Teachers are expected to assess their pupils' achievement against national benchmarks for the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Such information has been collected from schools since 1996/97, although the reference standards have

changed over that time period. The system had been based on a set of national benchmarks known as "Levels of Attainment" and had operated within a voluntary system of moderation of teacher assessments. In primary schools, the previous benchmarks related to student performance in Language and Literacy (English and/or Irish, as appropriate) and Mathematics and numeracy. However, the national benchmarks have changed: from 2012/13 onwards, teachers assess pupils against Levels of Progression. These have been designed to better fit the 2007 knowledge and skills based curriculum (see Chapter 3). Information is collected from schools on pupil performance in the cross-curricular skills of Communication and Using mathematics, which provide system information to monitor literacy and numeracy, respectively. To ensure reliability of the measures, a new moderation system is being introduced (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1 Introducing a system to moderate teacher assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3

Schools in Northern Ireland report aggregate measures of teacher assessments of pupil performance against national benchmarks at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. For many years, this was conducted within a system of voluntary moderation. At primary level, schools could use centrally developed assessment tasks to aid their judgement and could request external moderation by the CCEA, and at post-primary level, schools could choose to administer tests developed and marked by the CCEA. However, experience has revealed a tension between this "fully delegated assessment model" and the use of pupil performance information to provide a measure of system accountability: "there will be differences, real or perceived, in how individual schools and teachers interpret assessment" (DENI, 2013).

From 2012/13 a new mandatory system of moderation is being introduced with the aim to build greater confidence in the consistency of reported standards across the school system. The new system of moderation is being introduced for Key Stage 3 assessments in 2012/13 and for Key Stages 1 and 2 assessments in 2013/14. Initially, schools will be moderated on one or more of the cross-curricular skills during the first two or three years, but once the new approach is embedded, moderation will take place within a three year rolling programme. This new approach will be monitored and evaluated by the CCEA.

A twofold approach to moderation: Quality assurance and quality control

Quality assurance at the school level

There should be a planned, whole-school approach to ensure that relevant staff collaborate, understand the Northern Ireland standards and build confidence in the assessment process.

To prepare for implementation of quality assurance at the school level, the CCEA provided a specific training programme comprising: awareness raising for school principals and senior managers (autumn 2010); face-to-face training for staff with assessment responsibilities (spring 2011); and detailed system-wide training in school clusters (summer 2011 to May 2012). The CCEA also provides assessment support materials and regularly updates an online resource for schools with exemplars of assessment tasks and pupil work. The CCEA also engages teachers to perform the external quality control, as described below, and provides specific training to these teacher moderators.

External quality control of school's moderation standards

The CCEA verifies that schools are applying internally agreed standards and intervenes and provides support to schools demonstrating a lack of consistency in the accuracy of teacher assessments of pupils against the Levels of Progress.

Box 6.1 Introducing a system to moderate teacher assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 *(continued)*

During each school year, teachers will compile a portfolio for each pupil containing examples of work illustrating the assessed level. In March 2013, schools being moderated submitted to the CCEA a complete list of pupils in the relevant year (Years 4 and 7 in primary schools, Year 10 in post-primary schools) along with the proposed teacher assessment against the Levels of Progress for each pupil. The CCEA randomly selected pupils and contacted the school to request portfolios for those pupils by a certain date. The CCEA requested portfolios for between 10 and 17 pupils, according to the total number of pupils being assessed in the school.

Moderators within the CCEA reviewed all portfolios and sent written feedback to each school. The CCEA recruits teachers to work as moderators and train teachers to moderate school portfolios and to provide feedback. Feedback either stated that the teacher assessments were in line with the expected standards or indicated that adjustments were required. Where adjustments were required, schools were expected to adjust the teacher assessments and resubmit these to the CCEA by the end of the school year. Schools that have been required to make adjustments would be subject to re-moderation the following year.

Subsequent to the OECD review, the Department of Education advises that from 2013/14 some changes have been made to the moderation process in light of comments from teachers following their experiences in the first year of the new arrangements.

Source: DENI (2013), OECD Reviews on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Northern Ireland, Department of Education Northern Ireland, Bangor.

Performance at post-primary level

The introduction of Levels of Progression similarly impacts the collection of system level measures of pupil performance at Key Stage 3. The previous benchmarks related to English, mathematics and science. From 2012/13 on, schools will report aggregate information on pupil performance in the cross-curricular skills of Communication and Using mathematics. Moderation of teacher assessment at Key Stage 3 has been introduced in 2012/13 (see Box 6.1).

As stated above, student qualifications achieved at the end of compulsory schooling (GCSEs or equivalent qualifications), as well as in non-compulsory schooling (A levels or equivalent qualifications), are used as key performance measures in system evaluation. GCSE and A levels may be developed by different examination boards within the United Kingdom. The CCEA holds around 70% of the market share in GCSEs and around 73% in A levels (DENI, 2013). All of these examinations fit within an agreed National Qualifications Framework for the United Kingdom.

Student performance information from international assessments

Performance at primary level

Northern Ireland significantly strengthened its evidence base on how the system performs internationally with its participation, for the first time, in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) assessments in 2011. Specifically, these were the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

(TIMSS) and the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) that assess pupils in Year 6 (ages 9-10). Northern Ireland did not choose to participate in the TIMSS assessment at post-primary level for ages 13-14. These results are fully comparable internationally as they met sampling requirements after including replacement schools.

Performance at post-primary level

The United Kingdom has participated in the OECD's Programme for International Assessment (PISA) since its inception in 2000, and for subsequent rounds in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012. Results are reported for Northern Ireland in the OECD 2009, 2006 and 2003 initial results publications.

Information on quality of schooling gathered via external school evaluation

The Education and Training Inspectorate conducts three major types of external school evaluation: individual school inspections, area inspections, and thematic evaluations. These evaluations provide valuable evidence on quality within and across the school system.

Commissioned research

The Department of Education commissions research on specific aspects of the school system. Typically, calls for research proposals are issued every two years. For example, there is a periodic survey on bullying in the form of a standardised questionnaire to pupils, and more recently to teaching and non-teaching staff. A survey has been administered to a representative sample of 60 primary and 60 post-primary schools in 2002, 2007 and 2011. These result in final research reports presenting results and analysing the policy implications. Access to research findings is provided on the Department of Education's website, presenting findings from Department funded research studies, international assessments and other research.[2]

Reporting of system evaluation results

Information that is submitted via the annual school data collections (SAER and SLS) is compiled and reported by the Department of Education. The Department of Education website provides a platform where users can find all relevant information on the school system. For example, if users search for statistics via the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) website, they are directed to the Department of Education website.[3] The major results from the SAER and SLS are reported in a series of statistical bulletins. These present aggregate results and do not present information on individual schools. Results are reported for individual schools on the Schools+ Database accessible via the Department of Education website (see Chapter 5 for more details).

In addition, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) presents data from the SLS up until 2011/12 in an interactive map that allows users to select key aggregate data for different Education and Library Boards, Local Government Districts and wards. This is part of the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service.[4]

The CCEA reports overall statistics for system performance at each key stage of education on its website.[5] The reporting format is clear and straightforward.

Every two years a summary report is produced by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) drawing on information from school inspections carried out over the preceding two-year period. The most recent report was published in October 2012.[6]

The ETI also publishes reports on particular themes that have been identified as a priority for policy. Examples of themes include special education schools, the use of virtual learning environments and a review of the implementation of the revised curriculum (DENI, 2013).

Strengths

School system evaluation is positioned within the wider government expectations for accountability

A key recommendation coming out of the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education is to situate school system evaluation in the broader context of public sector performance requirements (OECD, 2013). When Ministries and other bodies with specific responsibilities for system evaluation need to show accountability for their performance, this stimulates demand for procedures to monitor progress in the school system and, where necessary, to establish adequate systems to collect evidence on progress. This is particularly the case in systems where high level targets are set by the government related to productivity, competition or general economic and social improvement.

In Northern Ireland, school system evaluation is positioned within the wider public service management culture of target setting and accountability. This is linked to high-level goals set by the government to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage, and translated into concrete targets by the Department of Education (see above). The Department of Education has set targets focused on the performance of school leavers in public examinations. These are, therefore, both linked to student assessment and to school evaluation, as the aggregate performance of pupils in public examinations is used as a school performance measure. The school improvement policy *Every School a Good School* (ESaGS) (DENI, 2009) includes targets for the period 2008-2011, and the literacy and numeracy strategy (*Count, Read: Succeed*) sets out longer-term targets for 2020 with key milestone targets. The 2008-2011 targets were established as a way to hold the Department of Education accountable for its school improvement policy. The longer-term targets aim to introduce the ambition to see sustained improvements over a longer period (DENI, 2011, paragraph 8.6).

Specific goals to improve equity in the school system

The available evidence on the school system in Northern Ireland indicates key concerns for equity (see Chapter 1). The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) voiced strong expectations for "an approach to target setting which will communicate a clear message around which schools can mobilise resources in tackling underachievement in literacy and numeracy." (DENI, 2011, paragraph 8.3). Linked to the wider government strategy to tackle disadvantage, the Department of Education has set specific targets for improvement in key outcomes for pupils entitled to free school meals. One of two overarching goals for the Department of Education is to increase equity and equality and to close the performance gap (see above). This sets important references for system evaluation and communicates the importance of addressing the significant equity challenges. Importantly, the overarching goal is much broader than a focus on demonstrated improvements in qualifications among pupils entitled to free school meals. There is a goal to examine the effectiveness of support and area planning mechanisms that promote greater equity of opportunity for pupils and young people. There have also

been developments in statistical reporting, with the 2010/11 statistics on school leaver destinations for the first time showing information for young people with special educational needs.

A concern to develop valid measures to evaluate system progress

The Levels of Progression are designed to allow a more valid assessment of student progress against the knowledge and skills based curriculum. In turn, the Department of Education aims to collect measures to evaluate the system that are adequately aligned to the curriculum. At Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 the new approach aims to collect system measures that are based on teacher professional judgements on their pupils' level of progression. While many OECD systems have reformed curricula to promote a complex integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes and key competencies or "21st century skills" such as creativity and problem solving, the OECD review revealed a limited use of innovative assessment approaches and a prominence of traditional knowledge and skills testing (OECD, 2013). Policy in Northern Ireland seeks to address precisely these challenges with a focus on teacher professional assessment of pupils and assessment for learning. The proposal to collect teacher assessments of pupils against the centrally set Levels of Progression as a measure of system evaluation, therefore, should provide a rounded and more valid measure. In turn, the policy to provide primary schools with a diagnostic assessment tool can help support teachers in assessing their pupils' progress. The compilation of portfolios comprising examples of pupil work better supports the assessment of more complex achievement than traditional closed-ended testing formats (Looney, 2011).

The new moderation process holds strong potential to build teacher capacity in student summative assessment

A concern to ensure reliability of teacher assessments at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 has led to the introduction of a mandatory moderation system (Box 6.1). The OECD review team sees strong potential for the moderation system to promote and build teacher capacity and confidence in student assessment against the Levels of Progression, and indeed to further embed this assessment approach in schools (see also Chapter 3). This will also provide a more reliable and valid measure for system accountability.

The absence of a moderation system has posed challenges to the reliability of system measures in other OECD review countries. Notably, in the Slovak Republic where there is a low level of trust among educators and the general public in grades awarded by teachers, particularly in the use of these for academic selection at ages 11, 14 or 15 (Shewbridge et al., forthcoming). Official evaluations by the Slovak State Inspectorate reveal great inconsistencies among teacher grading, with large discrepancies among different schools offering primary education. The introduction of a national test at one of the main transition points (age 14) has seen a new policing role for the State Schools Inspectorate in ensuring the integrity of test administration at the school level, where serious concerns were reported in the early years of test administration. This has not addressed a need to build teacher capacity in assessing students against the revised competency-based curriculum. In Sweden, there is, in general, a higher level of trust in the professionalism of educators, but an increasing level of competition among schools (Nusche et al., 2011). A series of reviews of teacher grading conducted by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate identified a degree of variation among schools in teacher assessment judgements. Swedish schools already have developed a culture of internal quality assurance and systematic collaboration among teachers within schools, and in many cases

among schools. In this context, the OECD review team identified the need to introduce an external moderation procedure along the lines of the new one being currently implemented in Northern Ireland. It is expected to increase the reliability of the system level measures, while at the same time preserving the focus on teacher professionalism and the aim to provide a more valid measure. Crucially, it is seen as a way to further promote teacher capacity in assessing pupils against the national curriculum.

International measures on outcomes at primary and post-primary levels

Comparative data from international assessment programmes provide a frame of reference that "assists countries in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, provides them with an opportunity for a better understanding of their own system, and offers ideas for further research and policy development" (Tamassia and Adams, 2009). Such international assessments are specifically designed to provide reliable measures of performance at the system level, they do not seek to measure individual student performance. Alongside national qualitative measures coming from external school evaluation, these international measures are fit for purpose in providing information for system evaluation.

The participation for the first time of Northern Ireland in the IEA's TIMSS and PIRLS studies has provided internationally comparable information on pupil performance at the primary level. This is a significant addition to information for system evaluation, particularly as there has been concern on the reliability of pupil performance measures used at the primary level in Northern Ireland (see below). As such, there is internationally comparative performance information available to policy makers and the wider public at both the primary and post-primary levels. These provide useful information for system evaluation and can generate public debate on key issues in schooling. The collection of student background information during OECD's PISA also allows an examination of equity within the school system from an international perspective.

An approach to better mobilise evidence on the school system for policy making

Accountability is a major purpose of system evaluation in Northern Ireland. The wider government context, the target setting culture, and the strong public expectation to access information on schooling, all promote and demand an information-rich environment. With the proliferation of official statistics and evaluation reports, many OECD systems have struggled to make these useful for policy making. The availability of evidence and a policy of transparency in reporting this creates a wealth of information that can seem daunting to policy makers, and, in the worst case scenario, can be misunderstood or erroneously interpreted (OECD, 2013). The OECD review team identified in Northern Ireland a clear recognition of this challenge and several initiatives to better mobilise evidence for policy making.

Making statistics more accessible and interpretable

Policy officials within the Department of Education have a close working relationship with statistical officers in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Policy officials and statisticians identify areas for further analysis to better underpin the design of further policy interventions (DENI, 2013, p. 33; backed up by interviews during the OECD review). There is also an established series of "statistical press releases" that seek to complement the reporting of tabular or graphic raw statistics. They include definitions and interpretational text to make the results more easily digestible, while at the

same time presenting cautions and caveats on limitations to the statistics (see Box 6.2). These illustrate the application of best international practice on statistical reporting to pay adequate concern to accessibility and interpretability of the reported data (OECD, 2012).

Box 6.2 Making statistical evidence more responsive to policy needs

The Department of Education's Statistics and Research Team (which includes professional statistical staff seconded from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) has progressively organised its structure and services around different major users and demands for education statistics. For example, the team includes a specific section that lends support to the Education and Training Inspectorate. The team provides regular focused briefings for policy makers and identifies developing trends. In addition to increased requests from policy colleagues to provide an evidence base for the development and monitoring of education policies, The team answers requests for data from researchers, members of the public, the media and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The team provides a number of statistical press releases. These comply with the United Kingdom Statistics Authority Code of Practice, which specifies a number of reporting guidelines, including that statistics are well explained and readily accessible. As such, each statistical release includes sufficient commentary to enable users to meaningfully interpret the information. These usually take the form of a few introductory lines, major bullet points of key results and graphics showing trends and then the full set of results in tables. See for example: www.deni.gov.uk/year_12_and_year_14_examination_performance_at_post_primary_schools_2 01112__2_.pdf.

Fitting the results of external school evaluation to system priorities

The biennial report by the Chief Inspector is a well-established source of information to inform system improvement. The most recent edition (ETI, 2012) presents evaluation results against three major priorities for the system in Northern Ireland: achieving value, learning skills, and transforming communities. These themes aim to address the key issues in education and training in Northern Ireland, such as: "the links between good public value and high achievements and standards for all learners; the need for learners to acquire and develop the skills which will help them address the many personal, social and economic challenges they face to enable them to compete in a global economy; and, the aspiration for education to transform the lives of individuals and communities for the better" (ETI, 2012, p.5).

This presentation renders the findings from external school evaluation immediately more accessible for policy makers. The report goes on to present major findings at sector level (*e.g.* primary, post-primary), which also provides easy reference on key facts and an overview of performance and major challenges in each sector. With this approach, the report also allows a good understanding of relative priorities among the different educational sectors. The ETI organises conferences for school principals to disseminate the key findings in each Chief Inspector's Report and is open to attending events organised by stakeholders to discuss key inspection findings, *e.g.* a conference in early 2013 for the National Association of Headteachers.

Many stakeholders use the results of system evaluation

System evaluation results are used to inform policy making within the Department of Education. For example, system evaluation results were used to develop the *Every School a Good School* policy (DENI, 2013). The Department of Education uses information to

evaluate initiatives, such as the literacy and numeracy strategies and school improvement programmes, as well as to review progress towards targets. The Education and Training Inspectorate uses system information to facilitate the school inspection process, including as part of risk assessment and monitoring the progress of schools under the Formal Intervention Process. Other accountability uses include monitoring by the Northern Ireland Assembly, using the information within audit processes, and providing key information to the general public on the quality of schooling in Northern Ireland. Schools make use of system information in their self-evaluation activities.

A concern to collect qualitative information on the school system

Northern Ireland is one of the OECD systems with an established mechanism for external school evaluation. As well as providing key information on the quality of individual schools, the evidence collected during external school evaluations can provide useful qualitative information on the school system as a whole. In Northern Ireland, there are also periodic surveys conducted by researchers in priority areas for the school system, *e.g.* bullying, which involves the collection of feedback from teachers and students. The participation of Northern Ireland in the present OECD review represents a commitment to evaluative studies on an international level. Indeed, the participation in international assessments at the primary and post-primary levels provides insight as to how pupil perceptions in Northern Ireland compare to those of other pupils internationally, and to how school principal reports on key aspects of schooling compare internationally.

Challenges

Building trust and a system-wide understanding of the new measures for system evaluation

The collection of aggregate measures of pupils against the Levels of Progression at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 from schools will provide new measures for system evaluation. The new mandatory system of moderation being introduced aims to ensure a high degree of reliability in these measures across schools. However, the OECD review team sees a significant challenge in building trust in the new measures. The legacy of the previous reporting of information by schools for accountability purposes, but within a system of voluntary moderation, is a widespread distrust among educators of the reliability of the previous "attainment level" measures (see also Chapter 3). The use of non-moderated pupil assessment data for system accountability created a tension in the perceived credibility and reliability of the reported results. Representatives from post-primary schools reported a wide variation among primary schools in the reliability of teacher assessments of pupils' attainment levels and it is common practice to administer diagnostic tests at the start of post-primary schooling. There is therefore an urgent need to build confidence in the new measures by engaging educators sufficiently in the proposed moderation system.

The introduction of a new assessment system at the primary level will necessarily lead to a "break in series" of comparable performance measures on pupil outcomes. This presents a challenge in communicating to the wider public that changes in the reported measures may not necessarily indicate real improvement or decline in school system performance. On the basis of comparability studies conducted by the CCEA, it is expected that the new Levels of Progression are more demanding and that the new measures will likely show a drop in aggregate pupil attainment (DENI, 2013). This will

entail communication challenges to allow meaningful interpretation of trends over time. In particular, an inadequate communication strategy runs the risk of real or perceived political or other, misuse of the results, which will increase the tension on educator engagement in the new moderation system. The OECD review team envisages particular sensitivity around the use of these new measures in the context of school accountability. These measures provide important information for the Education and Training Inspectorate's assessment of risk as part of external school evaluation. For example, schools being inspected over the coming years may be concerned about the interpretation of any reported differences in the performance measures. In particular, this will add challenges to schools currently in the Formal Intervention Process that need to demonstrate improvements. Any perception that there is a degree of inconsistency in the official use of the measures or misinterpretation of the results would pose a significant challenge to embedding the new moderation process.

Minimising the reporting burden on schools in providing information for system evaluation

In the wider policy environment in Northern Ireland, there are clear expectations for accountability in public services and for demonstrated improvements towards agreed central targets. In this context, the absence of specific national instruments to collect measures of pupil outcomes for system evaluation places additional demands on schools. The results of individual student summative assessment are aggregated to provide measures for school and system accountability. In the case of measures of individual student achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 and in non-compulsory schooling, this requires schools to report aggregate information in the annual school performance return. However, for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 schools need to report aggregate teacher assessment of pupil outcomes in literacy and numeracy against the Levels of Progression. The moderation system is designed to flow from classroom practice, that is, teachers would compile evidence of pupils' regular work. Certainly in the initial years of implementing the new moderation system, the reporting process at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 may require additional effort for teachers as they better understand the nature of the system. There has already been industrial action related to workload issues (see Chapter 3).

Performance targets use a narrow set of measures

Several systems make use of targets as they allow a more straightforward interpretation of information from education system evaluation procedures (Scheerens et al., 2012). The key measures to monitor progress of the school system in Northern Ireland remain student outcomes in final examinations at the end of secondary schooling (both GCSEs and A levels). Within the context of the target setting culture of the public sector service management approach, the major targets driving the evaluation of the school system are limited in scope. The broader evidence base on the school system is not integrated into the overall evaluation approach. The use of student achievement information is a valid outcome measure. However, outcomes cannot be simply attributed to government actions or processes, as other factors outside the government's control are frequently involved (OECD, 2009). This implies that the assessment of performance against outcome targets can usually be done only generally.

In this light, a narrow set of measures may heighten the interpretational concerns around progress towards targets. During the OECD review, representatives of the business community expressed a preference for a broad set of measures going beyond academic outcomes. Although the official policy in Northern Ireland is to use these

targets to assess progress in the school system as a whole, the publication of unofficial league tables in the media continues to present these as measures of school success. A CBI report on the United Kingdom as a whole is critical of the five A*-C grade GCSE target as it "is little more than a scoring standard for government to measure schools" (CBI, 2012, p.54). There is similarly a concern to build credibility in performance targets. A 2006 report from the Audit Office identified the frequent adjustment of literacy and numeracy targets. This led to a call by the Public Accounts Committee to maintain a consistent approach to target setting (DENI, 2011, p.53). However, this related to a downward adjustment of targets and the Department of Education subsequently upwardly revised its targets in March 2011 as part of the *Count, Read: Succeed* policy (DENI, 2011).

Ensuring adequate reporting on equity goals

The inclusion of specific system targets to improve the performance of socially deprived pupils is a signal of increased political focus on equity goals. With this more prominent focus, some stakeholders voiced concern on the adequacy of reporting systems to measure equity. As an indicator for social deprivation, the Department of Education uses the percentage of students entitled to free school meals (DENI, 2013, p.29). This is conveniently collected in the school census return. The Department of Education defends this measure as being current and highly correlated with a multiple deprivation measure (DENI, 2013). However, the OECD review team heard some criticisms on whether this measure adequately reflects deprivation. This perception is a risk to the credibility of system evaluation and school evaluation approaches. A number of stakeholders consider that the Department of Education does not take account of the context in which schools operate and identify the need for a measure of contextual value added to accompany school performance measures (DENI, 2013, p.34). This also provides challenges to external school evaluation and school self-evaluation activities (see Chapter 5).

Aligning reporting systems adequately to reflect system changes and priorities

The Department of Education is currently implementing many changes to the organisation and provision of schooling opportunities to young people. Clearly, this presents strategic challenges in system-level reporting and will concern the reporting of all central data. The OECD review has noted the current efforts to provide more valid measures of system performance at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. A typical challenge when implementing a new assessment system is the "reporting lag". For example, among the OECD review countries, Luxembourg is introducing a new "competencies-based curriculum" with an aim to encourage a focus on the progression of pupil development. However, the national reporting systems still reflect the traditional approach with a focus on the structure of the school system and performance in different school types (Shewbridge et al., 2012). In Northern Ireland, the changes in governance structures with the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will need to be adequately reflected in reporting systems. The OECD review team notes that the current reporting systems present a fragmented structure, with aggregate data reported by management/administrative types (Education and Library Boards, Council for Catholic Management of Schools), academic selectivity, etc. (see Chapter 1).

While Northern Ireland is one of ten OECD systems that maps existing information against identified priorities for the education system, other systems are more strategic in anticipating future needs for the reporting system (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Indicators of a strategic approach to education system evaluation in OECD countries (2012)

A plan to prioritise further collection of information and a mapping of existing information against education system priorities	Australia; Czech Republic; Hungary; Israel; Netherlands; Slovak Republic
A mapping of existing information against education system priorities	France; Iceland; Ireland; Northern Ireland (UK)
A plan to prioritise further collection of information	Belgium (French and Flemish Communities); Chile; Finland; Slovenia; Spain
Neither	Austria; Denmark; Italy; Korea; Luxembourg; Mexico; New Zealand; Norway; Poland; Sweden

Note: Canada – all provinces/territories either have a mapping in place or plan the prioritisation of information collection. The table should be interpreted as providing broad indications only, and not strict comparability across countries.

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

Policy options

System evaluation is an important component of Northern Ireland's evaluation and assessment framework. The reporting and communication of system-level information promotes public awareness of equity goals and an understanding of the priorities for schooling in Northern Ireland overall. There is a great deal of information available to policy makers to evaluate the system. The following policy options recognise this and mainly focus on aspects of reporting, communication and use of results:

- further mobilise evidence to give an overall evaluation of the school system based on a broad set of goals;

- raise the profile of equity goals and research and communicate ways to more effectively monitor these;

- prioritise clear communication on the nature and purpose of the new system-level measures;

- develop a strategy to more effectively monitor the progress of student learning throughout the system;

- secure capacity for system evaluation;

- consider ways to incorporate parental voice in system evaluation.

Further mobilise evidence to give an overall evaluation of the school system based on a broad set of goals

Northern Ireland is an information-rich school system. There is also a commitment to use evidence in policy making and to ensure that there are high-quality measures of school outcomes. However, it is not always possible to devise indicators and measures of good quality across all the objectives of the education system (OECD, 2013). As outlined above, the dominant measures are those used in performance targets, which have been set to support the key strategy to focus efforts on improving literacy and numeracy. However, there is much more system-level information available to help assess the

overarching goals for the Department of Education. Indeed, much of this is already reported in the ETI's biennial Chief Inspector's Report. The OECD review team sees room to better integrate the results of external school evaluation to monitor a broader set of system goals. While the results from a two year period of individual school evaluations are not statistically representative of the school system in Northern Ireland in that period, they do present key evidence that complements the existing performance targets. Evidence from external school evaluations will not provide answers on progress in the overall system from year to year, but further analysis of these findings over a number of years can provide more authoritative evidence on the school system.

Raise the profile of equity goals and research ways to more effectively monitor and report on these

Across OECD countries, the data of interest for analysing equity at the system level include: student socio-economic background (often measured by their parents' education level and occupation); student first language and whether this is different from the language of instruction; student place of birth; and information on any special educational needs. However, the relative importance of these factors will vary from system to system. Often such information is drawn from Labour Force Surveys, as well as the regular population census, and may also be collected via the administration of questionnaires to students during national assessments. Not all countries systematically collect information at the individual student level (Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden). Northern Ireland has a specific measure at the individual pupil level: entitlement to free school meals. Among the OECD review countries, Portugal also collects information from publicly funded schools on whether or not students receive free school meals and assistance for special educational needs, but also on the profession of the students' parents (Santiago et al., 2012).

During the OECD review, some stakeholders raised concerns over the validity of the Free School Meal Entitlement measure. This measure is used as it is current, highly correlated with the multiple deprivation measure, and available via the annual school census return (DENI, 2013). Such a measure should be more valid than a measure drawn from survey data, but the OECD review team lacks research into the advantage and disadvantages of the use of this measure in Northern Ireland. In Australia, the lack of individual student information has been flagged as a concern in potentially undermining conclusions about the impact of socio-economic factors on school outcomes over time (Santiago et al., 2011). Research has pointed to the risks of using an area-based measure of socio-economic status to estimate an individual's socio-economic status (Marks et al., 2000).

Conducting similar research in Northern Ireland would provide an evidence base for further developing or better defending the current measure. This may help to counter the perception among some stakeholders that the Free School Meal Entitlement measure is not adequate (DENI, 2013). Greater transparency in this area is critical given the high level goals for school and system improvement. Schools provide detailed reports on the qualifications and destinations of individual pupils as part of the annual School Leavers Survey. Examples of the information collected include special educational needs, whether the pupil is in care, and the residential postcode of each school leaver.

Given the priority of equity in the government's programme of work, a more prominent and focused reporting on this is recommended. A simple approach could be to have a dedicated space on the Department of Education's website that provides an easy

overview of all system-level information on equity. There are, for example, several Departmental research briefings with rich information, but users need to navigate through each specific year and cannot readily find research related to pupils with special educational needs, boys, pupils in deprived areas, etc.

As identified in Chapter 5, there is also room to better align existing reporting on school performance. The Schools+ Database includes benchmarks for post-primary schools on selective or non-selective schools, but not for free school meal entitlement. Whereas the ETI reports on individual school inspections include free school meal entitlement as the major benchmark. System-level statistical circulars include information on free school meal entitlement bands, although these are not consistently reported in school level reporting.

Prioritise clear communication on the nature and purpose of the new system-level measures

As outlined in Chapter 3, the OECD review team recommends that the Department of Education communicates the primary purpose of the end of Key Stage assessments is to be formative and summative at the pupil level, that is, to inform the subsequent learning of the individual pupil and to report levels of pupil progress to pupils and parents. The decision to collect information in discrete areas (i.e. the cross-curricular skills of Communication and Using mathematics) of pupil assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is taken within a wider context of requirements for performance information for accountability. The OECD review has highlighted across systems the importance of communicating the purpose of assessment. This is ever more important when the results are used within an accountability system. An in depth review of accountability systems and related literature in the United States identified the need for communication about the accountability system's results and limitations to schools, school providers and the general public as one of seven core components in a well-designed and effective accountability system (Perie and Park, 2007). Part of this communication includes regular evaluation and review of the system and feedback on the extent to which it supports high-quality instruction. This highlights the importance of establishing a long-term communication strategy in Northern Ireland that draws on feedback from evaluation activities conducted by the CCEA, and feedback from key stakeholders. The promotion of best practice examples could perhaps be identified via external school evaluations conducted by the ETI.

The OECD review team understands that the decision to not centrally collect results from the computer-based assessments in primary schools (which were mandatory at the time of the OECD review) was to avoid an over-reliance on the results of these diagnostic assessments in accountability, and to favour more rounded teacher assessments of pupil learning progress. This aims to protect the integrity and use of the computer-based assessments for diagnostic purposes as part of instructional activities at the school level, and indicates a recognition of the literature that identifies the potential risks of using a high stakes test-based accountability system. For an overview of literature on the importance of maximising test validity by ensuring a use of test results that is fit for purpose see Rosenkvist (2010) and Morris (2011). The OECD review team questions to what extent such policy reflection on trade-offs and mitigating risks within an established accountability context is known to the wider public. A related point is the lack of official communication channel with parents (see above).

Develop a strategy to more effectively monitor the progress of student learning throughout the system

Changing the assessment approach to better match Northern Ireland's knowledge and skills based curriculum will require significant commitment to building assessment capacity. The approach to school system evaluation can help to promote this and to build capacity. The introduction of a moderation process to ensure reliability in system-level measures is a strategy that aims to both promote capacity development and the credibility of the new assessment approach. This also holds great potential to more effectively monitor the progress of student learning across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. However, the OECD review team sees room to go further in promoting a more effective monitoring of student learning progress.

First, as recommended in Chapter 3, there is currently a loss of information on pupil progress at the stage of transition from primary to post-primary schooling. To promote the continuity of assessment approaches and sharing of information, there may be quick and efficient ways to capitalise on the potential of C2k school-based information systems to share information across primary and post-primary sectors. At a minimum, these would include pupils' assessed level of progression at end of Key Stages 1 and 2.

Second, there is room to develop a more systematic longitudinal research strategy. The OECD review team notes that the data collected for the School Leavers Survey include a Unique Pupil Reference Number.[7] However, Northern Ireland is one of the OECD systems reporting that no longitudinal data are available (OECD, 2013). Since 1996, New Zealand has introduced a unique student identifier (the National Student Number, NSN). This can be used for longitudinal research studies. However, student privacy must be respected. This unique identifier facilitates the management and sharing of information about students across the education sector in a way that protects their privacy (Nusche et al., 2012). At the level of the Ministry of Education, almost all data collection from schools is set up to enable longitudinal analysis, using the NSN as a link. The existence of a widely applied unique identifier covering both schooling and the tertiary sector is a key strength of system monitoring in New Zealand. The NSN can be used by authorised users for the following five purposes: monitoring and ensuring a student's enrolment and attendance; ensuring education providers and students receive appropriate resourcing; statistical purposes; research purposes; and ensuring that students' educational records are accurately maintained. Among other things, the NSN is applied for reporting purposes by education agencies, analysis of student assessment data over time, moving data between software applications, and issuing documentation students need to present to other schools or education providers.

Third, there is room to conduct further analysis on available information across the different levels of education and going into the labour market. The Education and Training Inspectorate has a unique position within Northern Ireland's policy arena as it evaluates the quality of the educational experience for young children before compulsory schooling, throughout schooling and through to further and higher education. There is also the evaluation of prisons and community services. This presents a unique insight to cross-departmental challenges and priorities and can be used as a vehicle to identify priorities for further research. In turn, research results can feed more effectively into the biennial Chief Inspector's Report. The Northern Ireland Education Research Forum could play a pivotal role in deepening analysis across the schooling, further and higher education and labour market sectors. It brings together the Departments of Education and

Employment and Learning, as well as the ETI and representatives from higher education institutions.

Secure capacity for system evaluation

System evaluation is an important component of Northern Ireland's evaluation and assessment framework and will play a key role in promoting and establishing the prominence of new assessment approaches and organisational structures. These changes will entail significant work for statistical and reporting services.

There will need to be a regular review of the new moderation process to assess demands on capacity at the school level and centrally in the CCEA. In tandem with the recommended school evaluation approach to trust schools with demonstrated capacity to improve, the OECD review team sees merit in considering an accreditation programme, whereby schools that have demonstrated consistency in initial verifications earn an accredited status and are trusted to conduct moderation processes. There would be a periodic reaccreditation process and school internal quality assurance processes for key stage assessment could be evaluated as part of external school evaluations.

Within the CCEA, there is already significant capacity for the development of tasks and other student assessment items. The OECD review team supports going further with the provision of exemplar tasks and pupil work at the central level to support the implementation of assessment against the Levels of Progression (Chapter 3). In terms of system evaluation, it will be important to continue to build this capacity centrally and to adequately engage educators in a collaborative approach to improving the assessment arrangements. With this assessment capacity, it would be prudent to review the CCEA's role in providing diagnostic assessments to schools. The existing procurement barriers have caused difficulty for educators at the school level in conducting their pupil assessment and school self-evaluation activities. Schools need to be assured of a testing system that can support their assessment of a pupil progression throughout the primary level. Given that the CCEA holds 70% of the market share of GCSEs administered in Northern Ireland, it would be advisable to review the interest among schools in using a CCEA developed diagnostic test at the primary-school level.

The OECD review found that in some countries, demands placed on external school evaluation bodies, in terms of providing information for system evaluation, impact on their capacity to undertake individual school evaluations (OECD, 2013). While the inclusion of information from the ETI in system evaluation is a considerable strength, due consideration should be given to ensuring that this is well balanced with priorities in school evaluation. The OECD review team recommend that the ETI establish a research and analysis capacity (Chapter 5). This may well strengthen the ETI's capacity to further mobilise school evaluation evidence for system level analysis.

The OECD review team recommends that the Department of Education continues to ensure and strengthen the focus on research and analysis more generally.

Consider ways to incorporate parental voice in system evaluation

The OECD review team noted the processes at the school level to gain feedback from pupils on their learning (Chapter 3). However, Northern Ireland lacks a consultation platform for parents to provide input into system evaluation and policy development. While parents are given the opportunity to comment on their child's school during the external school evaluation process, there is no mechanism to ensure representational

feedback on key policy developments. This seems pertinent given the observed gulf between official policy and parental expectations in key areas (see for example the discussion of unregulated transfer tests in Chapter 3). The OECD review team recommends that the Department of Education considers supporting the establishment of a consultation platform for parents, an established practice in many OECD systems. Periodic parental surveys are also useful for seeking feedback and are currently administered to parents in fourteen OECD systems (OECD, 2013). For example, Australia has developed a new national survey on school quality that schools will administer to students, teachers and parents and the results of which will be presented in annual school reporting. Questions relating to key policy debates could usefully be included in NISRA's Omnibus Survey – Education Module, an annual sample survey that has included 20 education-related questions since 2008.

Notes

1. See examples of information requested from schools: www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/content-pupilqualifications/school_performance/statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education-summary_of_annual_examination_results_documentation.htm

2 . See: www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/32_statistics_and_research-research_pg.htm

3 . See: www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/default.asp6.htm

4 . All interactive education statistics can be accessed via the following link: www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx

5 . See: www.ccea.org.uk/statistics/

6. The report can be accessed at the following link: www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/the-chief-inspectors-report/ci-report-2012.pdf

7. See "School Leavers Survey Procedural Guidance, Appendix A": www.deni.gov.uk/school_leavers2013.pdf

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Conclusions and recommendations of the OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Northern Ireland

School system context

Within the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has had power over educational policy since 1999

Northern Ireland has had a politically difficult past with conflict and a highly divided society. In 1998 powers were devolved within the United Kingdom to a newly established Northern Ireland Assembly. Since 2007 there is a power sharing agreement between five political parties. The locally elected Minister of Education is responsible for setting policy direction and targets for the school system. Pupils in Northern Ireland study towards qualifications that are recognised throughout the United Kingdom within a National Qualifications Framework.

Nearly all pupils in Northern Ireland attend a public school, but this system is highly fragmented

Children follow 12 years of compulsory schooling from age 4 to 16, transferring to post-primary school at age 11. The vast majority of pupils are in public schools (grant-aided) and follow a common curriculum set out in 4 Key Stages (1 to 2 in primary and 3 to 4 in post-primary), with a common system of summative assessments. However, there are distinct school categories for public schools according to which body awards their funding and the type of school management. While the Department of Education directly funds 31% of post-primary school and 3% of primary schools, the local authorities (the five Education and Library Boards) fund the majority of schools and are the employing authority for teachers in "controlled schools", in which 80% of pupils are of Protestant denomination. Teachers in "Catholic maintained schools" are employed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). There is a proposal to bring more coherence to this system with the establishment of an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) that would be responsible for all public schools. In practice, the Board of Governors (BoG) in all schools is responsible for leading and managing the school. Current policy aims to further develop and strengthen its role.

*Economic disparities impact schooling,
particularly at post-primary level in
international comparison*

While the unemployment rate is slightly below the OECD average, there is a high rate of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. Social deprivation varies significantly among local government districts, as shown by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Compared internationally, the school's socio-economic composition explains a much larger proportion of difference in outcomes at age 15 in Northern Ireland. Regardless of management type, post-primary schools fall into two major categories: academically selective (mainly "grammar schools") and non-selective schools. Some 43% of pupils are enrolled in academically selective post-primary schools; a proportion that has increased slightly despite a drop in the total number of children in the Northern Ireland school system. Selective post-primary schools show a range of socio-economic intake from only 1% to 23% of pupils entitled to free school meals, but in all cases this remains below the average of 28% for non-selective post-primary schools. In some non-selective post-primary schools, there are high concentrations of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Strengths and challenges

*Evaluation and assessment policies recognise
the importance of a coherent approach, but
there is room to go further*

In important ways, Northern Ireland stands out internationally. As in all systems within the OECD review, different components (pupil assessment, school evaluation, teacher and school leader appraisal and school system evaluation) have been developed at different stages, but policy development in Northern Ireland aims to bring these together into a more coherent framework. The Department of Education's policies recognise many of the potential synergies among these different components: school inspection pays attention to pupil assessment policies and pupil involvement in assessing their own and their peers' learning; annual objectives for teachers are linked to a school's self-evaluation of its development needs; the Board of Governors should ensure that the principal annually reviews teacher performance and professional development needs; the school development planning process is evaluated by school inspectors and any recommendations for improvement should feed into the School Development Plan. However, there is a need to generate synergies in other areas: school inspection may double up on some self-evaluation activities in schools where these are highly developed; the role of teacher registration is not clear and there is limited use of the results of teacher appraisal to inform career progression.

A coherent evaluation framework ensures consistency in procedures. A major challenge to the Northern Ireland evaluation and assessment framework is the duplication of pupil assessment procedures. To address this, the introduction of a moderation procedure for end of Key Stage assessments is expected to increase trust among primary and post-primary schools in the reliability of teacher assessments and reduce the use of additional assessment procedures. However, there is also a need to address inconsistencies in the implementation of school leader and teacher appraisal.

Evaluation and assessment policies aim to better connect to classrooms, but teachers report concerns on implementation

There is a strong focus in official policy on teacher professionalism, which is a desirable principle in designing assessment policies that aim to strengthen the link to classroom activities. The new moderation procedure for key stage assessment gives a central role to teachers. There is also an approach to engage educators in pilots and the development of key policies. While the OECD review team noted some concerns on the feedback of teacher views in specific pilots, the general approach is sound and the revision of the policy on computer-based assessments in primary schools indicates that teacher feedback is taken seriously. If constructive professional feedback from teachers over the new procedures is not adequately addressed, there is a real risk that implementation will remain tokenistic. Particularly in the context of a long established and polarised political debate over academic selection at age 11.

Expectation that evaluation and assessment lead to improved pupil learning and outcomes, but concerns over school support services

There are system-wide targets to improve both the quality and equality of pupil outcomes in Northern Ireland. Key policies communicate the expectation that learning targets are applied and followed at the individual pupil level. Diagnostic assessments are provided to primary schools to aid the assessment of pupils against key areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum. Over recent years, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has introduced a clearer reporting format for individual school inspection reports to highlight key areas for improvement, with the assessment of pupil learning outcomes being an important part of school inspection. For many years schools have benefitted from supporting tools for school self-evaluation. However, the priority attributed to school support services has been found to vary across Education and Library Boards. The proposed Education and Skills Authority (ESA) would take over responsibility for school support services, but at the time of the OECD review there was a high degree of uncertainty among educators about the form the new support model would take. School inspection identifies schools most in need of improvement, which sends the signal for support services to primarily target these schools. This is likely to impact on a wider offer of professional development services to all schools.

New procedures to assess cross-curricular skills support the further implementation of the Northern Ireland curriculum

The 2007 Northern Ireland curriculum focuses on knowledge (key areas of learning) and skills (Communication or Literacy; Using Mathematics or Numeracy; Using ICT; and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities). It aims to allow more flexibility for teachers to exercise their professional judgement in organising lessons, and to better connect learning across the curriculum. Since 2012/13, schools follow new statutory assessment procedures at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 that are designed to support the curriculum. Teachers are responsible for pupil assessment and must report to parents on their child's progress in all areas of the curriculum on at least an annual basis. A set of learning standards

(Levels of Progression) has been developed to support a coherent assessment of pupil progress across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT. Pupils are assessed by their teachers to see if they have reached the expected levels in these skills at the end of each Key Stage. Central computer-based assessments are offered to primary schools to support pupil assessment in Communication and Using Mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Policies promote formative assessment that involves pupils, but teachers raise concerns over the Levels of Progression

Formative assessment has been widely documented to have a strong positive impact on teaching and learning and is embedded in the curricula of many OECD countries. In Northern Ireland, formative assessment is at the core of the official assessment strategy to support the revised curriculum. School inspection indicators of high quality teaching and learning include the effective use of assessment data, formative assessment and the involvement of pupils in self- and peer-assessments. Teachers' professional judgement is central to the new summative assessments in Communication and Using mathematics at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, which is also likely to strengthen the integration of formative assessment in the classroom. However, teacher representatives reported that early experiences had raised questions on how meaningful the broad Levels of Progression will be for formative purposes. Depending on how widespread such concerns are, this could identify a need to further develop them. At the early stage of implementation, there seemed to be some demand to develop further supporting tools, including more sample assessment tasks for teachers.

Providing central diagnostic tests at the primary level is a good policy, but several concerns were raised about them

The introduction of a centrally developed, computer-based assessment tool for diagnostic purposes fits well with an official assessment strategy that focuses on assessment for learning. It supports a wider national strategy to reduce inequities in pupil outcomes, as tests provide feedback to schools on pupil performance standardised to Northern Ireland's school population. It could also introduce efficiencies at the school level, as many schools pay for commercial standardised tests. The central tests generate feedback on pupil progress for parents. However, public sector procurement requirements resulted in the introduction of a new set of tests in 2012/13. During the first year of implementation, teachers reported technical problems and raised concerns about their functionality. An official review has documented these implementation problems and the use of these tests in 2013/14 is not compulsory. The lack of continuity in central tests seems to have presented considerable challenges to schools.

Regular reporting on pupil progress to parents, but limited exchanges between primary and post-primary schools

There is a strong framework for reporting to parents on their child's learning progress. Teachers are required to provide an annual report on pupil progress from Years 1 to 14. An additional requirement from Years 4 to 7 is for teachers to meet with parents

and to provide written feedback on pupil performance in the computer-based assessments. These central tests include a special function to generate progress reports for parents, although teachers have identified a need to make these reports more informative for parents. Partly as a consequence of the moderation procedures at primary level being voluntary for many years, the reliability of the assessment data they provide is not trusted and is largely ignored by post-primary schools. However, there has been no culture of feedback from post-primary schools to primary schools and most post-primary schools re-test pupils upon entry. The new moderation of teacher assessment against Levels of Progression will address concerns on the reliability of results, but many post-primary schools would like to receive more detailed assessment information on "Level 4" pupils. For several years, a large proportion of post-primary schools administer commercial entrance tests, which duplicate assessment procedures for pupils and reportedly influence teaching practices in some primary schools, as teachers prepare pupils for these entrance tests.

A well designed teacher appraisal model is linked to school development, but it could better meet individual teacher needs

The Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme (PRSD) is a comprehensive teacher appraisal system for all teachers in grant aided schools, based on a number of internationally recognised good principles. Teachers' representative organisations played a role in its development and participate in its review every two years. It is clearly oriented towards staff development and the continuous improvement of practices. The annual process involves two lesson observations, a discussion of these observations between the reviewer and the teacher, and an action plan with objectives for personal and professional development in the following year. Teachers also get feedback from school inspectors as part of the lesson observations during school inspections. Internationally, the teacher appraisal model stands out in its clear intention to create synergies between teacher appraisal, school self-evaluation and school development. The teacher appraisal process is strongly school-based and one or two of the three personal objectives teachers set in their appraisal are typically school-wide objectives. However, too strong a focus on whole-school priorities reduces the relevance of the PRSD process for individual teachers and many teachers identify a need for professional development that better meets individual needs and provides specific and relevant training.

A common understanding of what constitutes good teaching guides initial education, but is underused by professionals

The teacher competence model describes 27 competences that teachers are expected to develop throughout their initial education and professional careers and includes a Code of Values and Professional Practice that provides a clear common reference for teacher appraisal. The model plays an important role in providing coherence across initial teacher education and the early years of a teacher's career. It clarifies what is expected of new teachers and creates a common language and reference for all those involved. It is also used as a reference for evaluating teaching and learning quality during school inspections. However, challenges remain in ensuring that it is also used as a reference for other aspects of the profession, namely: registration, regular teacher appraisal through PRSD and continuing professional development. The main references for the PRSD process are

the three personal objectives set for each teacher at the school level. Most reviewers involved in conducting PRSD processes for their peers have not received any training to appraise teachers in relation to the competence standards.

A professional body conducts a registration process, but this has little relevance to career and professional development

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) is an independent, professional and registration body for teachers. The Council provides advice to the Department of Education on standards of teaching and is responsible for the professional registration of teachers and accrediting education courses for pre-service teachers. The registration process provides accurate information about the composition and characteristics of the teaching profession, which is a key source of information for the development of teacher policy and aids schools with recruitment processes. While the registration functions as an official confirmation of a teacher's eligibility to teach, it does not involve an appraisal of the teacher's performance or an attestation of teachers' actual competences, and it does not correspond to a step within the teacher's career. All teachers having completed their initial education will be granted access to registration if they follow the required administrative procedure and annually renew the payment of a £44 registration fee.

School inspection is evidence based with strong quality assurance, but risk assessment presents new demands

The school inspection framework is broad, supported by international school effectiveness research and published and promoted for school use, which ensures transparency in criteria used. The ETI has several quality assurance procedures: an independent customer service evaluation; an independent annual collection of feedback from schools that have been inspected; a code of good conduct for inspectors; training; guidance materials, including common quality indicators that are complemented with illustrations of good practice; and the regular review and updating of guidance documents. The engagement of school leaders and other senior staff as associate assessors strengthens the ETI's working knowledge of schools. The ETI uses first-hand evidence via the collection of information from different stakeholders, an examination of pupils' work, and direct observation of the teaching and learning process. The collection of multiple perspectives on school quality from parents, teachers and other school staff helps to increase objectivity in evaluation results. However, the ETI does not have an established data analysis function and with this model it is restricted in its ability to move fully to a risk-based assessment system.

Policy supports school self-evaluation and promotes alignment with school inspection, but in some schools there may be a duplication of evaluation efforts

The legal requirement for a School Development Plan was revised in 2010 to set clear specifications of the areas to be covered and an expectation that evaluation is underpinned by performance and other data. School inspection evaluates leadership and management,

which includes the school development planning process, use of data among school staff, the quality of action planning, and the challenge and support function played by the BoG. There is well-established support to schools to promote the use of data in self-evaluation activities. The ETI has developed guidance material and promotes the use of inspection criteria. All grant-aided schools are provided with a centrally developed information management and analysis system that can support school self-evaluation by giving schools considerable flexibility in uploading all types of information, from continuous assessments to summative assessments. Some schools use this to monitor outcomes and learning progress throughout the school. This system can generate information for the ETI during school inspections. For the past 10 years, schools have received a benchmarking and target setting data package from the Department of Education. Data packages are now sent directly to the BoG with the aim to further stimulate their role in self-evaluation activities and, where applicable, to support their responsibility in school principal appraisal. Arguably as a result of this support, the ETI and the Regional Training Unit have identified many schools with well-informed classroom observation arrangements linking into school self-evaluation processes. In such cases, school inspections may duplicate some self-evaluation efforts.

School inspection emphasises school improvement, but there is a need to mitigate fears around the formal intervention process

The Department of Education's key policy for school improvement, Every School a Good School (ESaGS), emphasises that improvement belongs to the school. Formal school inspections identify areas for improvement (and these are detailed in inspection reports) and it is expected that schools address these. Inspectors give oral feedback to teachers whose lessons have been observed, and to school leadership on the results of surveys administered to parents, teachers and other staff. A system of visits from District Inspectors outside the formal inspection process can provide timely feedback for improvement. The Department of Education uses a Formal Intervention Process to follow up on schools with important identified areas for improvement and there is evidence that this is making a difference, as has been the experience in other OECD systems. However, the identification of schools in need of improvement is a difficult and delicate process and the clarity of procedures is crucial. While procedures are outlined in ESaGS, some stakeholders raised concerns around the nature of communicating with schools and the role of the media in this process. This appeared to be underpinned by anxiety around the future support services on offer to schools. The ESaGS policy envisages an important role for the proposed ESA.

Specific goals to promote equity in the school system, but a need to align reporting systems to new priorities

Linked to the wider government strategy to tackle disadvantage, the Department of Education has an overarching goal to increase equity and equality and to close the performance gap. This sets important references for system evaluation and communicates the importance of addressing the significant equity challenges in the Northern Ireland school system. To signal this increased political focus, there are specific targets for improvement in key outcomes for pupils entitled to free school meals, and since 2010/11, statistical reporting on school leavers includes information for young people with special

educational needs. These reporting developments provide useful information for system evaluation. However, some stakeholders voiced concern on the adequacy of reporting systems to measure equity. In particular, perceptions that the measure of pupil entitlement to free school meals does not adequately reflect deprivation is a risk to the credibility of system and school evaluation approaches.

A new moderation procedure will provide more reliable and valid system measures, but presents challenges

A concern to ensure the reliability of teacher assessments at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 has led to the introduction of a mandatory moderation system. The design of this system has strong potential to promote and build teacher capacity to assess pupils against the Levels of Progression. The aggregate results will also provide a rounded and more valid measure for system evaluation. However, the previous policy to report information by schools for accountability purposes, but within a system of voluntary moderation, has left a legacy of widespread distrust in such measures. There is therefore an urgent need to build confidence in the new measures by sufficiently engaging educators in the proposed moderation system. The use of new measures will also entail communication challenges to allow the meaningful interpretation of trends over time. In particular, an inadequate communication strategy runs the risk of real or perceived political, or other, misuse of the results, which will increase the tension on educator engagement in the new moderation system.

An approach to better mobilise evidence for policy making, but a need to better anticipate future reporting needs

Northern Ireland has rich information and evidence on its school system and has several approaches to feed this most effectively into policy making. A series of "statistical press releases" reflect international best practice. These complement the reporting of tabular or graphic raw statistics and include guidance on how to interpret the results, with clear information on statistical limitations. The most recent edition of the Chief Inspector's biennial report presents evaluation results against three major priorities for the system in Northern Ireland, as well as for different sectors. This renders the findings immediately more accessible for policy makers and allows a good understanding of relative priorities among the different educational sectors. System reporting is an important mechanism to reflect priorities and there is a need to be more strategic in identifying future information needs. Current reporting systems present a fragmented structure, and changes to the organisation and provision of schooling opportunities to young people will require significant changes in system level reporting.

Policy recommendations

Continue the focus on teacher professionalism and engage educators in designing future school support services

For the evaluation and assessment framework to impact on classroom practice, it will need to place considerable emphasis on its developmental function. Channels that are

likely to reinforce links to classroom practice include: an emphasis on teacher appraisal for the continuous improvement of teaching practices; ensuring teaching standards are aligned with student learning objectives; involving teachers in school evaluation, in particular through conceiving school self-evaluation as a collective process with responsibilities for teachers; ensuring that teachers are seen as the main experts not only in instructing but also in assessing their students, so teachers feel the ownership of student assessment and accept it as an integral part of teaching and learning; building teacher capacity for student formative assessment; and building teachers' ability to assess against educational standards.

A strong focus on professionalism implies the need for a significant, sustained and focused investment in professional development. The OECD review team underlines the opportunity to improve school support services with the proposed Education and Skills Authority. It is critical that educators are seriously engaged in helping to design these services. Teachers are best placed to communicate the reality of classroom teaching and the major demands for professional development and can play a crucial role in communicating relative priorities.

Prioritise efforts to effectively implement the evaluation and assessment framework

The OECD underlines the importance of communicating the long-term vision of what evaluation and assessment policies aim to achieve. Individuals and groups are more likely to accept changes that are not necessarily in their own best interest if they understand the reasons for the changes and can see the role they should play within the broad national strategy. This includes dissemination of the evidence basis underlying the policy diagnosis, the research findings on alternative policy options and their likely impact, as well as information on the costs of reform vs. inaction. Such communication and dissemination is critical to gain the support of society at large for educational evaluation reforms, not just the stakeholders with a direct interest. An analysis of evidence on Northern Ireland's school system suggests two significant aims would be to improve the quality and equality of pupil learning outcomes and to promote social cohesion.

In Northern Ireland, there is a sound approach to engaging educators in the piloting and review of different assessment policies. The OECD underlines the importance of reviewing and refining policies during the implementation phase. This is essential for building and ensuring continued commitment from stakeholders, as seen in Northern Ireland with the review of the computer-based assessments at the primary level conducted in 2013. Such reviews are critical in building credibility for the new approach and provide a mechanism for listening to schools, recognising any limitations, and addressing issues as a matter of priority. The policy to provide a central diagnostic tool at the primary level to support pupil assessment in literacy and numeracy is commendable and will help to align assessment practices with the curriculum. The subsequent decision to continue to refine these tests and to offer them to schools, underlines the commitment to providing supporting tools for schools to monitor pupil learning progress. However, there is room to more systematically engage educators in the discussion of evaluation and assessment results; particularly in the deliberation of how to develop policies to address identified challenges.

*Engage educators in improving the use of
Levels of Progression for formative
assessment*

The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) involved teachers in developing the LoP, and research indicates that this is likely to promote a better use of the assessment criteria. The CCEA's engagement of working teachers in the new moderation procedure will become an important new channel for professional development, and there is a great opportunity in the new moderation procedure to promote a common understanding of assessment in key areas across the primary and post-primary sectors. Educators can contribute assessment tasks to an evaluation portal that provides support for formative assessment. This would promote an open exchange of different assessment tasks among professionals, shed light on the types of tasks being used in different schools for Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5, and promote a better understanding of assessment against each of the LoP. It could also be used to ensure that educators take a lead role in providing finer details within each level, and could encourage a higher degree of professional accountability and a continual discussion of valid assessment against the LoP. Although experience from other OECD countries reveals that it is not an easy task to develop criteria that are clear and widely agreed upon, there appears to be demand among educators to do so. It will be important to engage a broad and representative cross-section of teachers in these efforts.

*Facilitate and promote the exchange of pupil
information from primary to post-primary
schools*

A more fruitful and effective exchange of information between primary and post-primary schools would strengthen and better promote the curriculum's focus on the progression of pupil learning over the different Key Stages. The assessment arrangements at Key Stages 1 and 2 should form the basis of transitional information following pupils in their journey to Key Stage 3, to whichever type of post-primary. Primary and post-primary schools will need to come to an agreement as to what kind of supplementary assessment data is useful, in particular at the individual level, and the requirements for the generation of this assessment data. In this process it would be important to listen to the needs of the post-primary schools to minimise the duplication of assessment for pupils. At the same time, the common approach should maximise the use of existing information on pupil performance available in many primary schools. It may be necessary to enhance the functionality of the Schools Information Management System to ensure an effective transfer of information across schools.

*Validate the central diagnostic tools and
ensure they respond to educators' needs*

The motivation to develop central computer based assessments is to provide powerful pedagogical tools for teachers to assess student learning and shape teaching to meet learner needs. These tools should support the implementation of the curriculum and assessment in relation to the Levels of Progression. However, there have clearly been implementation challenges that have damaged the credibility of central tests implemented in 2012/13 and there is a need to build an evidence-based case for the validity of these tests. Through a new validation process, the CCEA should ensure that these tests

incorporate as much as possible the functionalities that schools appreciate in the most frequently used commercial tests. If this is done successfully, it will reduce schools' needs for commercial tests. In addition, the reporting function in the tests should provide useful feedback for parents and educators. At both the primary and post-primary levels, the OECD review team identified a wish for a diagnostic measure that could be used to monitor the progress of an individual pupil and cohort progression through the school. Such educator needs should be kept in mind when developing and validating future tools.

Review the teacher competence model and use
this as a basis for a career structure

A framework of teaching standards is an important reference point for teacher appraisal. To ensure coherence between initial teacher education, registration, appraisal and professional development, it is essential to promote the wider use of the competence standards as a working document in schools. It would be helpful to conduct a review of the use of teaching standards and criteria by schools to understand how the competence model could better fit their needs. It would then be the role of the GTCNI to use the results of the review to revise the teaching standards in close collaboration with stakeholders in schools. It would be useful to develop clearer descriptions of the competencies necessary for different roles and career steps for teachers. This would not necessarily require different standards across stages of the teaching career, but could involve a single set of standards with appraisal criteria specific to distinct career levels. Such a revision of the competence standards would help recognise the variety of responsibilities in today's schools and the expertise developed throughout a career. The description of competences should be complemented by criteria and illustrations of effective practice, to help make the standards operational for regular use in school-based teacher appraisal.

Ensure that teacher appraisal is followed up
with adequate professional learning
opportunities

The use of PRSD for developmental appraisal should be consolidated. While the process should be school-based and retain its close link to the School Development Plan, it should be underpinned by the revised competence model and potentially be externally validated through school inspection. Ideally, teacher appraisal should result in tailored feedback for each teacher, which should be followed up with learning opportunities through professional development, mentoring or other means. It is important to plan for innovative ways to organise local delivery of learning opportunities and there is a need to envisage teachers' learning as something broader than participation in training courses. "Professional learning" is an internal process in which teachers create professional knowledge through interaction with information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings. This can happen where practitioners visit other schools, exchange practical advice and conduct action research. With the introduction of the Entitlement Framework, Area Learning Communities can promote professional learning, by strengthening collaboration and peer learning.

*Establish a competence-based career
structure for teachers and conceive
registration as career-progression appraisal*

To recognise and reward teaching excellence and allow teachers to diversify their careers, schools and teachers could benefit from a more elaborate career structure. This should match the different types and levels of expertise described in the revised teacher competence standards and make sure that career pathways are varied, with some teachers moving into leadership roles while others remain predominantly teaching in the classroom. Access to each career stage could be associated with a formal appraisal process through the teacher registration system that is based on a review of teachers' actual practice. Graduates from initial teacher education would apply to be "provisionally registered" with the GTCNI and then apply for full registration upon completion of their Induction and Early Professional Development Programme. Access to a promotion for fully registered teachers could be through a voluntary application process and teachers would be required to periodically renew their registration status. Appraisal for registration and registration renewal could be mostly a school-based process, but should include an external view, for example through an accredited external evaluator, which could be a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area.

*Ensure a healthy balance between external
challenge and support to schools*

In Northern Ireland, both challenge and support functions are long established and the key school improvement policy envisages a balance in these functions. While the Department of Education has the ability to challenge schools that are in most need of improvement through the Formal Intervention Process, at the time of the OECD review, the support function was in a state of flux with the winding down of the traditional support services to schools and the fact that the ESA had yet to be established. Experiences in other OECD systems indicate that the identification of areas for improvement is not enough and underscore the importance of building school capacity to undertake improvement actions. The proposed ESA presents a significant opportunity to harmonise and strengthen the support offered to schools by drawing on the extensive experience in the existing support bodies, and identifying their most effective practices. At the same time, the ESA can help support the BoG in undertaking its regular challenge and support role.

*Keep the focus on improvement and go
further in linking school inspection with
school self-evaluation capacity*

The OECD recommends external school evaluation adapts to reflect the maturity of the school self-evaluation culture and supports the move to a more proportionate and risk based school inspection approach in Northern Ireland. Systems should only move to a more proportionate approach once the evaluation culture is consolidated, evaluation capacity in schools is satisfactory, and data gathering and analysis within the school evaluation framework is established. Northern Ireland is a system that meets such requirements: there are well-established systems for data collection that can feed into school evaluation at both the central and school levels; many schools exhibit a high level and sophistication of self-evaluation activities; the ETI has helped to build school

leadership capacity in classroom observation and self-evaluation activities via its engagement of associate assessors; and as part of the inspection process the ETI directly assesses a school's self-evaluation processes and how these are used to manage and improve school quality. Therefore, there is a good evidence base for introducing a more proportionate approach to school inspections. The ETI continuously evaluates its approach and in 2013/14 now accepts a school's own self-evaluation and does not require schools to complete a specific evaluation form, which had initially been used to support the development of the self-evaluation process. This is expected to further improve the link with self-evaluation. For risk assessment, an additional key criterion could be a link with the CCEA's moderation feedback on the school's application of standards for end of Key Stage assessment.

Strengthen capacity for risk-based assessment within the ETI

The analysis of data in inspection activities, coupled with well documented procedures on decision rules for professional evaluation, is key to strengthening the standardisation of external school evaluation. The ETI benefits from external statistical and research capacity, but it also gathers data first hand when conducting school inspections, and this forms an important part of the evidence base. With the introduction of a new risk-based approach it is crucial that the ETI is able to direct the analyses and develop new indicators in key areas, including on pupil performance and school self-evaluation capacity. Without doubling up on current data collection processes, there is an argument for bringing together all different strands of data and research into a common knowledge base. This will bring evidence into close relation with the ETI's working processes and allow the development of an integrated body of knowledge on school quality. This can also more efficiently inform the ETI's risk assessment.

Promote heightened consistency in school self-evaluation and build the evaluation capacity of school leaders and the BoG

With school self-evaluation at the core of school improvement, there are ever pressing needs to ensure adequate self-evaluation capacity among school leadership. The identification of the best aspects of existing training for school leadership should be a priority in redesigning support services in the proposed ESA. There is room for a more active collaboration with the ETI in redesigning these services by promoting its specific training offered to associate assessors, notably the techniques for classroom observation. Although a group of volunteers, the BoG holds important evaluation responsibilities and it is important to develop guidance materials and training to support, in particular, its capacity to undertake task and classroom observations as part of the annual appraisal of school principals. Already, the ETI individual inspection reports comment on the BoG under the evaluation of leadership and management, and this can identify effective evaluation models. While the capacity of those conducting appraisal is of key importance, the active use of professional standards for school leadership can promote excellence, provide common reference criteria and contribute to a fair, valid and reliable appraisal process.

*Raise the profile of equity goals and research
ways to more effectively monitor and report
on these*

Given the priority of equity in the government's programme of work, a more prominent and focused reporting on this is recommended. A simple approach could be to have a dedicated space on the Department of Education's website that provides an easy overview of all system-level information on equity. This would bring together the different research briefings on pupils with special educational needs, pupils in deprived areas, etc. It will also be important to ensure a consistent approach to reporting on equity in school evaluation and system evaluation. Research into the relative advantages of different measures for equity would ensure credibility for the choice of the major measure of pupil entitlement to free school meals. Greater transparency in this area is critical given the high level goals for school and system improvement.

*Prioritise clear communication on the nature
and purpose of the new system-level measures
and secure capacity for this*

The OECD recommends a clear communication that the primary purpose of the end of Key Stage assessments should be to inform the subsequent learning of the individual pupil and to report levels of pupil progress to pupils and parents. The decision to collect information in discrete areas (i.e. the cross-curricular skills) of pupil assessment at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 seeks to balance requirements for performance information on the school system, which can be used to improve the system. A clear communication of the purpose of assessment includes regular evaluation and review of the system, and feedback on the extent to which it supports high-quality instruction. A long-term communication strategy should draw on feedback from stakeholders and from evaluation activities conducted by the CCEA, and promote best practice examples, perhaps identified via school inspections.

There will need to be an assessment of demands on capacity at the school level and centrally in the CCEA. Schools that have demonstrated consistency in initial verifications could earn an accredited status and be trusted to conduct moderation processes. There would be a periodic reaccreditation process and school internal quality assurance processes for key stage assessment could be evaluated as part of school inspections. Within the CCEA, there is already significant capacity for the development of tasks and other pupil assessment items. There may be a role in the longer term to secure central capacity to develop diagnostic assessments for schools and to ensure their continuity and heightened functionality.

*Develop a strategy to more effectively monitor
the progress of pupil learning throughout the
system*

The introduction of a moderation process holds great potential to more effectively monitor the progress of student learning across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. At the stage of transition from primary to post-primary schooling, there may be quick and efficient ways to capitalise on the potential of C2k school-based information systems to share key assessment information. There is room to develop a more systematic longitudinal research strategy and to implement responsible research using a Unique Pupil Reference

Number. The Education and Training Inspectorate has a unique position within Northern Ireland's policy arena as it evaluates the quality of the educational experience for young children before compulsory schooling, throughout schooling and through to further education, as well as the provision of teacher education. This presents a unique insight to cross-departmental challenges and priorities and can be used as a vehicle to identify priorities for further research.

Annex A. The OECD Reviews on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes

The OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes is designed to respond to the strong interest in evaluation and assessment issues evident at national and international levels. It provides a description of design, implementation and use of assessment and evaluation procedures in countries; analyses strengths and weaknesses of different approaches; and provides recommendations for improvement. The Review looks at the various components of assessment and evaluation frameworks that countries use with the objective of improving student outcomes. These include student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation. The Review focuses on primary and secondary education.[1]

The overall purpose is to explore how systems of evaluation and assessment can be used to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education.[2] The overarching policy question is "How can assessment and evaluation policies work together more effectively to improve student outcomes in primary and secondary schools?" The Review further concentrates on five key issues for analysis: *(i)* designing a systemic framework for evaluation and assessment; *(ii)* ensuring the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment procedures; *(iii)* developing competencies for evaluation and for using feedback; *(iv)* making the best use of evaluation results; and *(v)* implementing evaluation and assessment policies.

Twenty-five countries are actively engaged in the Review. These cover a wide range of economic and social contexts, and among them they illustrate quite different approaches to evaluation and assessment in school systems. This will allow a comparative perspective on key policy issues. These countries prepare a detailed background report, following a standard set of guidelines. Countries can also opt for a detailed Review, undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD Secretariat and external experts. Fourteen OECD countries have opted for a Country Review. The final comparative report from the OECD Review, bringing together lessons from all countries, will be completed in 2012.

The project is overseen by the Group of National Experts on Evaluation and Assessment, which was established as a subsidiary body of the OECD Education Policy Committee in order to guide the methods, timing and principles of the Review. More details are available from the website dedicated to the Review: www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.

Notes

1   The scope of the Review does not include early childhood education and care, apprenticeships within vocational education and training, and adult education.

2   The project's purposes and scope are detailed in the OECD (2009) document entitled "OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Design and Implementation Plan for the Review", which is available from the project website www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.

Annex B. Visit itinerary

Tuesday 26 February	
09:30 - 11:00	Minister and Senior Department of Education Officials
12:00 -13:00	Chief Executive Designate of Education and Skills Authority (ESA)
13:00 – 14:30	Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)
14:30 – 16:00	Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
16:00 – 17:00	Heads of Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) in Education and Library Boards; Chief Executive of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and a Director from the Regional Training Unit (RTU)
17:00 – 18:00	Education and Skills Authority – Assessment and Qualifications Team
Wednesday 27 February	
09:30 – 12:30	School Visit One - Loughview Integrated Primary School
14:00 – 15:00	Northern Ireland Teachers' Council
15:00 – 15:30	School Leaders Associations from: - Association School and College Leaders (ASCL) - Northern Ireland Primary Principals' Action Group (NIPPAG)
15:30 – 16:00	Primary Governors Association for Northern Ireland
16:00 – 17:00	Sectoral support organisations: - Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) - Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) - Governing Bodies Association - Transferors' Representatives Council - Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE)
Thursday 28 February	
09:00 – 12:00	School Visit Two - Holy Family Primary School, Derry
14:00 – 17:00	School Visit Three - St Cecilia's College, Derry
Friday 1 March	
09:30 – 12:30	School Visit Four - Bunscoil an Iuir, Newry (Irish-medium primary school)
14:00 – 15:00	Universities' Council for Teacher Education Northern Ireland (UCTENI)
15:00 – 16:00	General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland
16:30 – 17:30	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and C2k

Monday 4 March	
09:00 – 13:00	School Visit Five - Belfast Model School for Girls
13:30 – 16:30	School Visit Six - Belfast High School
17:00 – 18:00	Group of parents organised by the Parenting Forum Northern Ireland (cancelled and meetings with parents at each school carried out instead)
18:00 – 19:30	Assembly's Committee for Education
Tuesday 5 March	
09:00 – 10:00	Northern Ireland Audit Office
10:00 – 11:00	Employers' Organisations
11:00 – 12:00	Education Researchers
13:00 – 14:30	Minister and Senior Department of Education Officials

Annex C. Composition of the review team

Marian Hulshof, a Dutch national, is the programme manager of Research and Development within the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. Current themes include transparency, information exchange between parents and the Inspectorate, accountability, governance, effects of inspections, as well as strategic development for the Inspectorate and international aspects of evaluation and inspection within the Inspectorate and outside (*e.g.* OECD Group of national experts on Evaluation and Assessment). She has worked with the Inspectorate since 2001 and previously coordinated Inspectorate work on quality information on higher education (HE) studies and research on Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies and institutions (*e.g.* transition from secondary education to VET, risk detection in private institutions). From 1983 to 2001 she was a senior researcher at the Institute for Research on Higher Education (IOWO) at Nijmegen University. Her research included learning psychology (motivation, attribution theory) and policy research for higher education (innovation, quality information on higher education studies based on visitation reports).

Deborah Nusche, a German national, is a Policy Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education. She is currently working on the *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes*. She has led the OECD Reviews in New Zealand, Norway and Sweden and has been part of the review teams in Belgium (Flemish Community), Chile, the Czech Republic, Mexico, Portugal and the Slovak Republic. With the OECD since 2007, she previously worked on the thematic reviews on *Education and Diversity* and *Improving School Leadership*. As part of these two studies, she has led several country reviews and case study visits in a range of countries. She co-authored the OECD reports "Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students" (2010) and "Improving School Leadership" (2008). She has previous work experience with UNESCO and holds an M.A. in International Development from Sciences Po Paris.

Claire Shewbridge, a British national, is an Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and is currently working for the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes. She has led the OECD reviews in Denmark, Luxembourg, the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Slovak Republic and has been part of the review teams in Australia, Norway and Sweden. Prior to this review, she most recently worked on the OECD Review on Migrant Education working on country-specific analysis for the Netherlands, Austria and Norway and co-authored the OECD report "Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students" (2010). For five years, Claire coordinated the PISA thematic report series, including reports on student use of computers, success and challenges for immigrant students, student competencies in general problem solving and mathematics and a focus on excellent students. She also led analysis of student attitudes towards science learning and the environment in the PISA 2006 survey. She also worked on OECD statistical publications Education at a Glance, OECD Employment Outlook and the Development Assistance Committee Chairman's Report.

Lars Stenius Staehr, a Danish national, is currently Project Manager at Novo Nordisk, driving global learning, development and assessment projects. In his capacity as a testing consultant for the Danish Ministry of Education, Lars participates in a review of the national computer-based test in English in Year 7 of compulsory schooling and the development of school leaving examinations in English. Previously, he has worked on the development and quality assurance of test items in the national computer-based tests, plus the validation of diagnostic language tests for the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs. A former Associate Professor at the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use at the University of Copenhagen, Lars holds a PhD in foreign language acquisition and assessment. From 1995 to 2001 he taught English and Danish at the post-primary level.

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The OECD is a unique forum where governments work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

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OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

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