



Report from the Quality working group (WG 1) to the ESSDE

Adopted by the WG on 20 September 2011

Introduction

The working group was established at the ESSDE's meeting on 11 June 2010. The agreed terms of reference of the group are to report to the ESSDE's meeting in October 2011 on the subject of the "culture of evaluation in Education".

Those who have attended the working group from the unions (ETUCE and EPSU) and from the employers (EFEE) are listed in *Appendix 1*. Hans Laugesen (ETUCE, DK) has chaired the working group. Meetings of the working group have been facilitated by Stefaan Ceuppens and his team from the Commission's Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs.

Methodology

The working group met on three occasions, 8 November 2010, 21 March 2011 and 20 September 2011.

The first meeting agreed that the working group would consider the conditions for creating an evaluation culture at school level that could promote school development and quality, involving the evaluation of individual teachers, the co-responsibility of students for a positive learning environment and whole-school evaluation. A short questionnaire was commissioned and members of the working group were asked to answer it so that the group could get an idea of the variations between countries.

The results of the questionnaire were considered at the second meeting. This meeting was also given a presentation by Claire Shewbridge of OECD on their major current comparative international study of systems of evaluation and assessment in Education. This meeting agreed on the basic structure of the report to the ESSDE in October and asked the secretariats in conjunction with the Chair to prepare the first draft in time for it to be circulated to members of the working group in early September.

The third meeting considered the draft in detail and based on those discussions the secretariats and the Chair have amended the draft and now present this report to ESSDE on behalf of the working group.

Appendices 2, 3 and 4 reproduce the agreed minutes of the three meetings. *Appendices 5 and 6* reproduce the slides used at the second meeting to summarise the replies to the questionnaire and to present the OECD study referred to above. *A supplementary report*, to be circulated with the final draft, analyses all the replies to the questionnaire.

Main objective

The agreed purpose of the report is **to promote a culture of evaluation that is accepted at all levels**. The clear implication of this is that the principle of evaluation is not in question. But it is clear that the actual experience of evaluation can be controversial. The OECD express this well:

“Information is critical to knowing whether the school system is delivering good performance and to providing feedback for improvement. Countries use a range of techniques for the evaluation and assessment of students, teachers, schools and education systems....But among stakeholders, tensions can arise over how evaluation and assessment techniques can, and should, be used. Some see them primarily as tools to encourage teachers and schools to improve. For others, their main purpose is to support accountability or steer the allocation of resources.” OECD, July 2009.

Identifying a process not a model

The wide variation between countries makes it highly unlikely that a single model of “best” practice could be identified and recommended for all European countries. The working group has instead tried to focus on the characteristics of a *process* which aims at developing a model that is suitable for the circumstances under consideration. Those circumstances could be a national context or a regional/local/institutional context.

Five key characteristics which the working group considers such a *process* should include are listed below:

- Clarity
- Inclusivity
- Simplicity
- Consistency
- Stability.

Clarity. What is/are the purpose(s) of the evaluation: improvement, accountability or both? How will the evaluation be conducted, how often and by whom? Who will be consulted in the evaluation process? What will be reported in public and what in private? Is there scope for an appeal against a disputed evaluation and in what circumstances?

Inclusivity. Experience outside the education sector as well as inside it demonstrates clearly that any system that includes some kind of judgement of performance is much more likely to have the support of employees if they are fully involved in the process of designing the system in the first place. There are other stakeholders to consider too of course, such as parents and pupils, the school board and the local representatives of the employers. This is discussed at more length below in the *Stakeholders* section of the report.

Simplicity. Complex systems often fail as a consequence of their own contradictions and if it is not possible to explain clearly to employees, parents and pupils what the purpose of an evaluation system is and how it operates, it is that much more difficult to gain the all-important acceptance that such systems need. While it is easy to make this point in favour of simplicity, it must be recognised that sometimes complexity is the result of the intention to be

fair in all foreseeable circumstances. Sometimes however it may be fairer not to legislate for every possible contingency in advance and instead to trust in the common sense and goodwill of those involved by leaving them more room to take account of local circumstances.

Consistency. The evaluation of the performance of a school should take into consideration the contribution of all staff, including non-teaching staff, teachers, principals and managers. The engagement of pupils in creating and keeping a positive learning environment in the classroom should also be taken into account. The same principle of consistency applies to the evaluation of individuals. All staff, including the principal, should be seen to be subject to the same regime. This means that where the principal is the evaluator of individual teachers, the principal's performance needs to be evaluated by somebody not on the school staff (for example, members of the school's governing body or external school inspectors).

Stability. Frequent changes to systems and structures of evaluation can be de-stabilising and this factor needs to be taken into account, without becoming an excuse for avoiding necessary and beneficial change.

Focus areas

Performance, added value and process are three key areas for consideration.

In evaluating a school or a teacher, the objective will usually include the desire to improve *performance*. Inescapably this raises the issue of how we assess performance in schools. We can easily agree that it is not only a question of comparing test results such as PISA or national examinations. Increasingly, schools are also judged by their success in developing "softer" competencies, such as team-working and citizenship. These are, by definition, much more difficult to assess, but a comprehensive approach to evaluation suggests that such factors should be included.

Some schools and teachers have a more difficult task to achieve a standard level of performance than others, because the starting point is not always the same. A school where most pupils are from migrant families in which a different language is spoken from the one used at school naturally has a more difficult job than other schools. Such difficulties can be addressed by allocating different levels of resources to schools according to their social and ethnic composition, but that rarely creates a "level playing field" between relatively disadvantaged and relatively affluent areas. This explains the importance of being able to assess "*added value*", the extent to which the teacher or the school makes a difference, and to take such assessments into account in order to make comparative evaluations fairer.

To improve schools, pedagogical practice sometimes needs to be changed. This can be the case when there is more focus on training for 21st century competences or on the use of ICT in education. For such changes to succeed, there needs to be a climate which allows for trial and error. The important thing is to evaluate *process* and learn from previous experience.

Stakeholders

Consideration needs to be given to how to involve the interests of stakeholders such as pupils, parents, local employers and school governors, both in the initial design of systems and in their operation

It may be appropriate to distinguish involvement in *school* evaluation from involvement in the evaluation of *individuals*. In some countries, parents and pupils may be asked for their opinions about the performance of the school as a whole; but not in relation to the performance of individual members of staff. This is a matter for consideration within the context of each national culture.

Similarly, in some countries the opinions of pupils and parents are taken into consideration in an evaluation of an individual member of staff only if that individual consents. This too seems to be a question for national or local consideration.

Tools and methods

One of the clearest messages to emerge from the questionnaires completed by members of the working group was that there is a growing trend towards *self-evaluation*. This is true both for school evaluation and for individual evaluation.

Such self-evaluation needs to be seen as a complement to external evaluation, not as an alternative to it. In most contexts, self-evaluation seems to operate as a kind of prelude to the external evaluation.

The effectiveness of such self-evaluation is likely to be enhanced if it is *structured*, so that those conducting self-evaluation are given a framework of questions and considerations in advance of the external evaluation.

Such frameworks are common in employment outside education, such as the technique of the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). Another framework that is commonly used is to set SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-defined) in order to work out priorities for performance in the period ahead and to assess success or otherwise in achieving previously set objectives.

The experience elsewhere is that such systems work best when the individual and/or the institution being evaluated “owns” the objectives, in other words genuinely agrees that the objectives set (for the organisation/individual employee) are appropriate and fair.

Another interesting trend observed in the answers to the questionnaire is an apparent shift in the focus of Education Inspectorates from *compliance* (an accountability model) to *assistance* (an improvement model). This is well exemplified in The Netherlands, where schools are required by law to evaluate themselves according to nationally determined criteria but the Inspectorate only visits those schools which study of online data indicates are “at risk” [of failing to achieve expected results]; and those visits are intended to help the schools concerned to analyse their weaknesses and to work out how to overcome them.

In relation to the evaluation of individuals, the Principal (or other senior manager) should probably have formal “one to one” meetings even with the most effective members of staff at least annually, to celebrate success, discuss future ambitions and identify development opportunities.

Gaining ownership

In the introduction of any new system for the management of staff in any field of employment, the goal is to demonstrate (not simply to “persuade”) that the new arrangement can benefit everybody concerned.

Naturally this can be difficult, but there are lessons to be learned from elsewhere:

- The involvement of stakeholders, including recognised trade unions, in the design of new systems is essential
- The implementation phase of any new system needs to be planned with as much care as goes into the design
- Managers need to be properly trained in evaluation and the training needs to cover the particularly difficult areas like giving feedback to individuals on their performance and balancing criticism and praise
- Staff too need to be trained in evaluation
- New systems should not be implemented too fast
- There should be willingness to adjust systems in the light of experience
- The introduction of any important new system is likely to fail if it is not adequately financed.

Actions

EFEE and ETUCE have applied for a project on evaluation in the education sector under the European Commission’s budget heading “Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations”. It is proposed that members of this WG should be invited to take part in the EFEE/ETUCE project and deliver an output for action at the ESSDE plenary in autumn 2012 based on the work done in the WG and in the project.
