Executive summary

Student learning outcomes in Portugal are around or slightly below the OECD average, depending on the skills assessed, and have shown some encouraging improvement in the last decade. Efforts which followed the 1974 Revolution to ensure access to education for all Portuguese resulted in a rapid expansion of enrolment. However, educational attainment remains a challenge. It is the lowest in the OECD area for the working-age population, with 30% of 25- to 64-year-olds having attained at least upper secondary education in 2009 (against an OECD average of 73%). Moreover, the high share of students leaving the education system too early with low skills remains a major problem. A range of reforms have been introduced in education in recent years, including new arrangements for school leadership, student learning standards, teacher appraisal, and initiatives to reduce early dropouts. In this context, the role of evaluation and assessment as key tools to achieve quality and equity in education was reinforced. While there are provisions for evaluation and assessment at student, teacher, school and system levels, challenges remain in strengthening some of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework, in ensuring articulations within the framework to ensure consistency and complementarity, and in establishing improvement-oriented evaluation practices. The review team identified the following priorities in its review of evaluation and assessment policies in Portugal.

Integrating the evaluation and assessment framework, emphasising improvement and developing capacity across the school system

In the last decade, Portugal has come far in developing the foundations of a framework for evaluation and assessment. A range of initiatives clearly communicate that evaluation and assessment are priorities in the school system and reveal a coherent and comprehensive agenda to develop an evaluation culture among school agents. However, at the present time, there is no integrated evaluation and assessment framework – it is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not visibly connect all the different components. An important initial policy step is to develop a strategic plan or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework and articulates ways to achieve the coherence between its different components. The process of developing an effective evaluation and assessment framework should give due attention to: achieving proper articulation between the different evaluation components (*e.g.* teacher appraisal, school evaluation and school development), and ensuring the several elements within an evaluation component are sufficiently linked (*e.g.* school self-evaluation and external school evaluation). Also, it is apparent that the policy initiatives in evaluation and assessment of the last few years have emphasised accountability over improvement. A priority should be to reinforce the improvement function of evaluation and assessment and reflect on the best ways for evaluation and assessment to improve student learning. This involves establishing strategies to strengthen the linkages to classroom practice, where the improvement of student learning takes place. Another

challenge are the limited evaluation and assessment competencies throughout the education system in spite of the considerable national efforts to stimulate an evaluation culture, as well as providing some competency-building learning opportunities. Hence, an area for policy priority is consolidating efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment.

Strengthening formative student assessment, supporting moderation of student work and fostering collaboration around student learning

From the beginning to the end of schooling, assessment of students is seen as integral to the work of teachers. In general, it can be said that the autonomy in assessment for teachers and for schools is uncontested and widely supported. However, generally there is a traditional approach to the organisation of classrooms in Portugal. Assessment for learning is not systematically used in Portuguese schools. There is little emphasis in assessment practices on providing student feedback and developing teacher-student interactions about student learning. In classroom and schools, the formative seems to be increasingly displaced by the summative and a focus on the generation of summative scores. As a result, Portugal needs a stronger commitment to improving students' achievement through the use of formative assessment to enhance student learning, rather than simply through the use of assessment summatively for recording and reporting learning. Building on the culture of evaluation and the centrality of the teacher in the assessment system in Portugal, greater focus on a culture of feedback on student learning would deliver a number of wins for the system. A further priority should be the strengthening of moderation processes within and across schools to increase the reliability of teacher-based judgments. The objective is to reduce the variations in the ways teachers assess students and set marks so equity of student assessment is improved. Some attention is given to this in the Portuguese system with a checking that the procedures have been followed and the criteria applied correctly. However, this process does not include discussion or analysis of student work, across classes in schools, across schools, nor at national level. Generating and sharing evidence of student learning at the school level might also be the basis for shaping the many meetings of teachers about results and grades towards genuine professional learning communities.

Refocusing teacher appraisal on improvement and strengthening career-progression appraisal

Despite the highly contentious debate about the design and implementation of teacher appraisal, a general consensus appears to have emerged among teachers regarding the need for teachers to be evaluated, receive professional feedback, improve their practice and have their achievements recognised. However, the review team formed the impression that there is still insufficient focus on the improvement function of teacher appraisal. This is due to a range of factors including tensions between the career progression and improvement functions of appraisal, limited opportunities for feedback on teaching practices, and insufficient linkages between teacher appraisal and professional development. In this context, it would be desirable to develop a component of teacher appraisal fully dedicated to developmental appraisal. Such developmental appraisal would benefit from a non-threatening evaluation context, a culture of mutually providing and receiving feedback within the school, simple evaluation instruments, supportive school leadership, opportunities for professional development and close

linkages to school self-evaluation. Also, the teacher appraisal model that has been introduced and adapted since 2007 forms a good basis for summative appraisal of teachers at key stages of their career. Such summative appraisal (or career-progression appraisal) should serve to maintain the principle of career advancement on merit, hold teachers accountable for their practice and complement the regular formative appraisal by providing an account of the ways in which it has contributed to professional development and improvement. The review team recommends the simplification of the 2010 model so as to reduce the administrative and organisational burden on schools, as long the suggested developmental appraisal of teachers is introduced. Also, it would be important to ensure the centrality of teaching standards. These are a key element in any teacher appraisal system as they provide credible reference points for making judgements about teacher competence. Finally, it is suggested giving a greater role in teacher appraisal to the school leadership team, which would provide them with a much-needed opportunity to exercise pedagogical leadership and support improvement of teaching across the school.
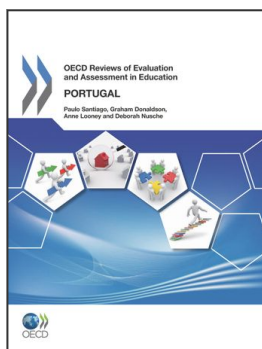
Focusing school evaluation on the improvement of learning and teaching and strengthening school self-evaluation

There has been a clear commitment to establish a powerful role for school evaluation within the overall strategy for quality improvement in education. Furthermore, the process of evaluation undertaken by the Inspectorate is well structured and systematic. However, there is insufficient focus on the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching. The direct observation of learning and teaching in the classroom is not part of the process. As a result, there is not enough emphasis on pedagogical aspects particularly on identifying the main features of effective or high quality teaching. Evaluation frameworks, the criteria and questions governing judgements and the methods employed should all focus much more directly on the quality of learning and teaching and their relationship to student outcomes. Government policy should articulate much more clearly the legitimacy of a focus on learning and teaching and student outcomes for both external evaluation and self-evaluation and that such a focus will be the key concern of wider accountabilities. The Inspectorate should be asked to revise its inspection framework to ensure that the quality of learning lies at the heart of external evaluation, including with direct classroom observation as an evaluation instrument. Also, although the importance of school self-evaluation has been recognised as a policy imperative over at least the last decade, its penetration across the school system remains at an early stage of development. It is clear that schools have only a limited understanding of the contribution which self-evaluation can and should make to improving practice and no clear models have emerged generally. As a result the profile of school self-evaluation needs to be raised and its alignment with external school evaluation needs to be improved.

Raising the profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework

The evaluation of the education system as part of the evaluation and assessment framework has received limited policy attention thus far and there is no comprehensive strategic approach to it. As it stands, system evaluation draws mostly on the evaluation of schools complemented with external student assessment (educational progress national tests and national examinations) and a set of indicators on education. Some key information gaps remain such as the unavailability of measures on students'

socio-economic background, the unavailability of analysis of student performance across student groups (*e.g.* by gender, socio-economic or immigrant background), and the limited information on the teaching and learning environment. At the same time, there are challenges in monitoring student outcomes over time and across schools. Also, system-level data are not used to their full potential in analysis which could be useful to inform policy development. Thus, the profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework needs to be raised. An initial priority is to broaden the concept of system evaluation as the wide range of system-level information which permits a good understanding of how well student learning objectives are being achieved. It should include a varied set of components such as broad measures of student outcomes; demographic, administrative and contextual data; information systems; and research and analysis to inform planning, intervention and policy development.