

Executive summary

Norway has a well-established tradition of decentralisation and school autonomy, with a strong sense of individual schools being “owned” by their local communities and accountable to them rather than the national authorities. This decentralisation is especially marked in the case of primary and lower secondary education, where, with the exception of a small private sector, schools are run by the 430 municipalities. Many of these, especially in rural areas, are very small and responsible for just a few schools each. In this decentralised context, evaluation and assessment are essential to monitor the quality of education nationally and provide feedback for improvement to school owners and schools.

The Norwegian authorities have set up a national quality assessment system (NKVS) for the education sector in 2004. NKVS provides access to a range of data and tools intended to help schools, school owners and education authorities evaluate their performance and inform strategies for improvement. The system initially included mandatory national student assessments, user surveys and a web-based School Portal, and was later complemented by additional tools and guidance to support evaluation at the local level. Taken together, the different elements of NKVS have the potential to provide the sector with a powerful toolkit to support a decentralised system of evaluation and assessment. Norway deserves credit for the initiative to create a multi-faceted evaluation and assessment framework that provides monitoring information at different levels and aims to achieve both accountability and improvement purposes. To further strengthen Norway’s approach to evaluation and assessment, top priorities are to:

Clarify learning goals and quality criteria to guide assessment and evaluation

For evaluation and assessment to be effective in improving quality across the whole education system, it is essential that all schools and school owners have a clear understanding of the level of performance that can be achieved by the most successful schools, and are able to accurately evaluate how their performance stands in comparison. This requires the development of a clear set of reference points for common orientation across Norway to help local actors evaluate the quality of processes and outcomes. There is room to develop clearer expectations and criteria for student performance in different subjects and year levels and to clarify key aspects of quality in teaching practices and school organisation.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training should engage with key stakeholders to (1) refine and expand national competence goals and provide clearer guidance concerning expected learning progressions and criteria for assessment in different subjects, (2) develop an evidence-based statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do, as a reference framework to guide teacher appraisal, professional development and career progression, and (3) establish an agreed framework of process quality indicators

for school evaluation that can help schools review and improve core elements of their practice such as teaching and learning, curriculum management, assessment approaches, and management and leadership.

Complete the evaluation and assessment framework and make it coherent

The establishment of NKVS and its various elements provide Norway with a strong basis to develop a comprehensive national framework for evaluation and assessment. However, the distinct purposes of the various tools and data sources established through NKVS have not been well communicated and there is little understanding of NKVS as a coherent system. It is now important to increase clarity in the communication about the evaluation and assessment framework, take stock of the work accomplished so far and enhance coherence between the different elements of evaluation and assessment. To this end, it would be helpful to develop a strategic plan or framework that clearly maps all the existing elements of evaluation and assessment in Norway, including those that are currently not perceived as part of NKVS.

In particular, teacher appraisal is an important element of a comprehensive evaluation and assessment framework that is currently not well integrated into NKVS. Teacher appraisal and feedback can be powerful levers to increase teacher effectiveness and achieve better student learning outcomes. To complete the evaluation and assessment framework, the appraisal of teaching practices should be integrated into NKVS, and be linked to both teacher professional development and school evaluation and improvement.

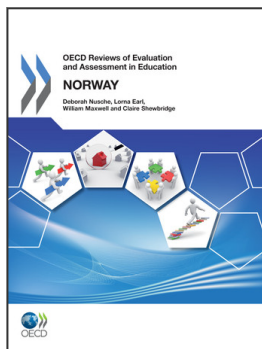
The national authorities should emphasise that the evaluation and assessment framework includes both formative and summative elements, and school-internal as well as external components. For each of the key components of evaluation and assessment, the framework or strategic plan could provide links to the relevant reference standards, and point to existing tools and professional learning opportunities. To make the system coherent, it is important that learning goals are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other elements align to work towards these goals.

Further strengthen competencies for evaluation and assessment among teachers, school leaders and school owners

The successful implementation of an evaluation and assessment framework crucially depends on whether professionals in counties, municipalities and schools have the understanding and competencies to collect, analyse and interpret evaluative information with a view to improve practices. Embedding an evaluation culture in schools and municipalities across Norway is a large culture shift that requires further investment in professional learning opportunities, targeted to the needs of different stakeholder groups.

- **Teachers**, responsible for student assessment, need to further strengthen their competencies to (1) interpret and follow up on student assessment results obtained from national tests and mapping tests, (2) develop valid and reliable assessment tools to meet their own specific local needs, and (3) enhance formative assessment practice, especially giving feedback and engaging students. To focus the professional learning offer regarding assessment, it would be helpful to define a set of teacher competencies related to assessment that can be integrated in overall teaching standards (see above).

- **School leaders**, responsible for both teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation, need to develop their skills to operate effective feedback, coaching and appraisal arrangements for their staff and to use data in a purposeful way for whole-school evaluation and improvement. The national training programme for new school leaders is a promising step in this direction. The provision of leadership training could be expanded to differentiate offers for a wider range of school staff including middle and deputy leaders, beginning leaders and experienced leaders. It is also important to ensure that school leaders receive adequate appraisal and feedback from their employers.
- **School owners**, responsible for external evaluation of individual schools and monitoring of their local education systems, need to develop the capacity to understand and make decisions based on evaluative information from their schools. In many parts of Norway, it is unrealistic to expect that individual school owners would be able to develop robust local quality assurance systems on their own and follow up with schools accordingly. It is likely to make more sense to build larger scale “shared service” approaches, which offer school improvement services, including external evaluation, coaching and consultancy, to groups of schools and school owners across a region. The County Governors could play a key role in promoting and supporting strategic partnerships between school owners and key sources of support.



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