

## Chapter 4

### Teacher appraisal

*The Slovak Republic has a clearly defined career structure for teachers with the following career steps: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first certification level, and teacher with second certification level. Currently, about 40% of teachers have reached the second certification level. A clear strength of the Slovak approach is that school-based regular teacher appraisal includes the observation of classroom practices. However, external teacher appraisal is disconnected from classroom teaching and is based on professional development credits and qualifications. There is room to improve the status of the teaching profession and the quality and quantity of the professional development offer. The development of a single, authoritative set of teaching standards is expected to promote a shared understanding of accomplished teaching.*

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The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

This chapter looks at approaches to teacher appraisal within the Slovak evaluation and assessment framework. Teacher appraisal refers to the evaluation of individual teachers to make a judgement about their performance. Teacher appraisal typically has two major purposes. First, it seeks to improve teachers' own practice by identifying strengths and weaknesses for further professional development – the improvement function. Second, it is aimed at ensuring that teachers perform at their best to enhance student learning – the accountability function (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). The analysis of teacher appraisal has to be seen within the particular national context. For an overview of key features of the teaching profession in the Slovak Republic, see Box 4.1.

## Context and features

### *Teaching career*

The Slovak Republic has a clearly defined career structure for teachers with the following career steps: beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first certification level, and teacher with second certification level. Beginning teachers pass an adaptation and mentoring period during the first two years of employment. The progression from “beginning teacher” to “independent teacher” is realised by a compulsory appraisal within the school at the end of the first two years of employment or earlier. Progress to the first and second certification levels is realised externally by an expert certification committee. Currently, about 40% of teachers have reached the second certification level.

### *Appraisal procedures*

#### *Appraisal at the end of induction*

Beginning teachers are required to complete an adaptation education programme within the first two years of employment. This adaptation education is organised by the employer in line with the framework programme for adaptation education issued by the Ministry. The adaptation education programme typically lasts for one year and involves a mentor periodically observing the beginning teacher's teaching and providing help and consultation. Following legislation (in particular the Directive of the Ministry of Education No. 19/2009) the school leader determines the beginning teacher's completion of the programme. To complete the programme, beginning teachers are observed in class by a three-member examination board appointed by the school leader (the school leader acts as chairman of the board) and this is followed by an evaluation dialogue. The teacher's competencies are evaluated in relation to what they have learned in the adaptation education programme. Upon successful completion of the adaptation programme, a beginning teacher receives official notification from the school leader and moves to the next step of the teacher career (independent teacher). If a beginning teacher does not complete the adaptation education within the first two years of employment, his or her contract is terminated by the employer (Eurypedia, 2012).

#### *Regular appraisal for performance management*

According to the 2008 School Act, school leaders are required to regularly appraise their pedagogical staff. The Act prescribes that teacher appraisal should be undertaken once a year, at the end of the academic year. The school leader is responsible for regular internal appraisal, but may delegate this authority to lower positions in the school, such as the deputy school leader. However, the legislation does not prescribe the procedures to be

used for teacher appraisal and schools have a high degree of autonomy regarding the way they implement regular teacher appraisal for performance management. School leaders are expected to specify the aims, criteria and methods of appraisal in the internal school regulations, while accounting for the school's specific context, educational programme and priorities. At the end of the year, school leaders write an evaluation report regarding the performance of each teacher, which is stored within the teacher's file but not forwarded to any other level of the education system.

The primary aim of this internal teacher appraisal process is formative, i.e. the appraisal should provide feedback on the teacher's performance and inform teachers' competency development. School leaders are required to establish continuing education plans for the following academic year, which should reflect the appraisal results of their teaching staff. At the same time, appraisal results may also influence teachers' salary levels through a personal bonus attributed based on extra tasks and performance. However, school leaders appear to have little room for manoeuvre in awarding such bonus payments due to resource constraints at the school level (more on this below).

### *External appraisal for career advancement*

Career and salary advancement are not linked to the internal appraisal of teachers by their school leaders. They are instead determined based on indicators of teachers' learning and professional growth. There are three different ways for teachers to have their competencies validated and advance on the career/salary scale.

### The credit system

First of all, teachers' career advancement is linked to their accumulation of credits through the completion of continuous professional development. The terms for obtaining credits are determined through the 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees. According to the Act, teachers may obtain credits for: completing an accredited programme of continuous education; having their professional competencies (acquired through self-study or pedagogical practice) verified by an examination committee; passing a doctoral examination, a national foreign language examination or broadening their teaching scope (e.g. adding another subject); undertaking measurable creative activities related to pedagogical practice; and/or authoring or co-authoring teaching tools, textbooks or methodological materials.

Accumulating credits is a pre-condition for teachers to progress in their career. In order to sign up for certification, teachers need to either acquire 60 credits or 30 credits and complete a pre-certification educational programme. The Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees established a direct link between the accumulation of credits and teachers' salary advancement. The system of credit evaluation determines that for each 30 credits obtained, teachers receive a 6% salary rise. Until recently, school leaders were legally obliged to provide this financial compensation to all teachers having obtained the required amount of credits. From 2012 onwards, however, this link is no longer automatic and school leaders are given a degree of discretion in this regard. All schools must create an internal school regulation specifying the conditions under which the school leader approves the credit salary rise. For example, if the training is not considered relevant for school development, then these credits may not be considered in decisions on possible salary rises.

### The certification system

Once teachers have accumulated the required amount of credits, they can apply for certification. For teachers to move up on the career ladder towards the first and second certification level (see above), they need to pass an external appraisal, which includes the defence of a thesis (also referred to as a ‘certification examination’) before a certification committee made up of organisations responsible for continuous teacher education. These organisations are set up by the Ministry of Education.

### The specialisation system

Teachers may also specialise in different types of positions such as class teacher, educational advisor or prevention co-ordinator. Generally, there is no special appraisal procedure for this, but school leaders decide on whether or not teachers obtain specialisation. In some cases, teachers may qualify for specialisation by taking particular professional development courses. The appraisal format is dependent on specific conditions defined by the accreditation of the particular educational programme. The 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees created an obligatory bonus system and determined that teachers taking on specialised functions, such as mentor teacher, receive a bonus pay.

### *Other forms of feedback to teachers*

Once a year, a national teacher’s day is organised in the Slovak Republic. On this day, outstanding teachers are celebrated and rewarded. This day can be an opportunity to provide a moral award for high performing teachers. Slovak State Schools Inspectorate, and teachers typically receive feedback from the Inspectors as part of these visits. The Inspectorate has developed an observation form with a list of indicators that are used by all inspectors in their classroom visits. After the observed lesson, teachers are invited to undertake a self-evaluation. Based on both the inspectors’ observation and the teacher’s self-evaluation, inspectors typically provide individual feedback to teachers in the presence of the school leader. However, the purpose of classroom observations by the inspectorate is to evaluate teaching quality of the school as a whole rather than to appraise individual teachers. The inspection reports, therefore, provide information about the overall quality of teaching in each school and do not mention individuals.

### *Competencies to undertake teacher appraisal*

Internal teacher appraisal is typically the responsibility of school leaders, but as mentioned above, it may be delegated to another senior staff member, such as the deputy. Other individuals, including the chairs of subject committees and methodology associations, may also participate in the process, depending on the size and organisational structure of the school. In smaller schools, the school leader is often the only evaluator, whereas in larger schools it is more common to share this responsibility among several senior staff in the school. Students and parents are only occasionally involved in the process through questionnaires.

To be eligible for school leadership, teachers must have at least five years of teaching experience. They also have to fulfil the qualification requirements of education for the relevant type of school facility, meet specified personality and moral preconditions, have good command of the Slovak language and, after appointment to the function, show good results in professional and methodological work.

There are mandatory courses to prepare school leaders and deputy leaders for their management tasks, which includes teacher appraisal. School leaders and their deputies are required to complete a “functional education” course within their first three years on the job. This education is provided in 160 to 200 lessons delivered over no more than 24 months. It comprises 40 lessons on the management of school personnel, 20 of them dedicated to teacher competency profiles and creating teacher appraisal and reward systems. After successful completion of the functional education course, every member of the school leadership team is obliged to pass a “functional innovative education” course every seven years. The innovative education course is delivered in 60 lessons. It is built around the experience of participants and emphasises innovation in the management of the school staff.

### *Using appraisal results*

Internal school-based teacher appraisal is part of the school’s performance management process and has both formative and summative functions. According to the education authorities, the predominant function should be formative, i.e. the appraisal should provide feedback to teachers and influence their professional learning and development. In addition, school leaders have some autonomy to use the appraisal results to provide bonus payments to outstanding teachers.

Sanctions are only applied in rare cases. If teachers underperform on the internal appraisal, school leaders are more likely to provide recommendations for improvement measures and give time to the teacher to develop and show improvement. In cases of serious underperformance or violation of legal regulations, it is possible for the school leader to dismiss teachers.

External appraisal for certification has a summative career-advancement function. Teachers’ results in the certification examination are used to determine career advancement towards the first and second certification levels. Such advancement on the career scale is linked to higher salary levels.

### **Box 4.1 The teaching profession in the Slovak Republic – Main features**

#### **Employment status and salary structure**

Teachers in the Slovak Republic are public servants. Conditions of service are set out in the Labour Code and the 2009 Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees, where teachers were ranked as protected persons. The majority of teachers have tenure (indefinite length of position) but there are also teachers on fixed-term contracts, mainly as substitutes for teachers who are absent for a long time.

There are four career grades and two career positions. The four career grades are beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with the first certification level and teacher with the second certification level. The two career positions are pedagogic employee and chief pedagogic employee. Career advancement is based on demonstrable acquisition of professional competencies of teachers based on formal and informal learning for which they can gain credits. Teachers' advancement on the career scale goes in line with salary advancement.

Teacher salary scales are based on the Law Code on employees performing work in public interest. The salary scale consists of 14 salary grades for the entire education system from kindergarten to university, where each grade has 12 salary stages. Salary advancement is determined primarily by length of service. Salary stages are divided initially into two years of practice, but a more speedy advancement is allowed after the first two years. The abovementioned Act also makes it possible to provide personal bonuses to teachers for the fulfilment of exceptional and especially important tasks.

#### **Prerequisites to become a teacher**

To be admitted to higher education institutions providing teacher education, students must have passed the secondary school-leaving examination and provide an application including their curriculum vitae, health certificate and an explanation why they have chosen the particular study branch. Some study programmes mostly in the areas of physical education, music and arts also organise entrance examinations ("talent examinations"). After completing initial teacher education, teachers are hired into schools through an open recruitment procedure led by the school leader. The prerequisites to access the professional status of teacher are outlined in the Act on Pedagogical Employees and Specialist Employees. They include professional and teaching qualifications, civil irreproachability and moral maturity.

#### **Initial teacher education**

Initial teacher education for primary and secondary school teachers takes place at the universities. Upon completing the school-leaving examination at secondary schools, there are three different ways for students to obtain a teaching qualification: (1) Students may enrol at teacher education faculties, where they can complete Bachelor and Master level teacher education – the length of study is five years. After the defence of a thesis and completion of the State final examination they receive a pedagogical qualification, (2) students may enrol in a different study field and concurrently complete supplementary pedagogical study. Upon completion of both programmes, they may obtain a professional qualification and a pedagogical qualification, (3) students may complete supplementary pedagogical studies after completing a professional qualification in another field.

### **Box 4.1. The teaching profession in the Slovak Republic – Main features** (continued)

#### **Teacher professional development**

School leaders are responsible for the professional development of teaching staff. They prepare a professional development plan for the school pedagogic employees, which they have to submit to the school founder. The plan should include key priorities, a time schedule and a budget proposal for professional development activities in the coming year. Teachers typically apply for professional development they would like to undertake through the school leader. The school leader is in charge of prioritising teachers' training requests in line with the educational and pedagogical needs and conditions of the school. Based on this judgement, the school leader submits requests for teachers' admission into professional development programmes.

Professional development is provided by a range of different institutions including higher education institutions and educational organisations of the Ministry of Education (the National Institute for Education, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre and the State Vocational Institute). The largest provider of professional development is the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC). The Centre has about 150 pedagogical employees and is organised in one head office plus three regional offices. The main role of MPC is to develop and provide in-service education and training to teachers, but it also has other responsibilities such as developing support materials for teachers, developing the national teaching standards and conducting a project on school self-evaluation. Traditionally, the training provided has been mostly individual, but since 2011 there has been a shift towards more focus on group training.

*Sources:*

Eurypedia (2012), *European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems: Slovakia*, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovakia:Overview>.

NÚCEM (National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements) (2012), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for the Slovak Republic*, NÚCEM, Bratislava, [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy).

## **Strengths**

### ***The idea that teachers should be evaluated is widely accepted***

The principle that teachers should be appraised appeared widely accepted in the Slovak Republic. Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team reported that they found classroom observations and feedback on their work valuable to develop their own professionalism. Across the system, there appeared to be a positive and motivational connotation to teacher appraisal. Several interviewees spoke about the national teacher appreciation days and moral appraisal as important opportunities to recognise and celebrate excellent teaching.

Teacher perceptions of the appraisal process, as measured in 2007-08 (before the current regulations were introduced), appeared to be overall positive. In the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)<sup>1</sup>, 81% of the Slovak teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their appraisal/feedback was a fair assessment of their work as a teacher in the school (against a TALIS average of 83%), and 78% agreed or strongly agreed that their appraisal/feedback was helpful in the development of their work as a teacher in the school (against a TALIS average of 79%) (OECD, 2009).



Representatives of the teacher union reported that while there is room to make teacher appraisal more objective, the principle that teachers are evaluated is valued and accepted. Union representatives also appreciated the possibility for teachers to receive additional bonuses and salary increases based on evaluation results, although they expressed concerns about the possible subjectivity of the school leader's decisions in this regard (more on this below).

There are also indications that school leaders consider teacher appraisal important for their work. A 2006 project conducted for the optimisation of school leadership education mapped the opinions of school managers regarding the importance of different parts of their work. The school leaders who participated in the study considered teacher appraisal as the most important aspect of their work, and, together with school evaluation, one of the leading factors of school quality. At the same time, however, it should be noted that school leaders considered classroom observation as the least important part of their work, which might be linked to a relatively formal approach to classroom observation (more on this below) (NÚCEM, 2012).

### *There are initiatives to develop teaching standards*

As part of the project *Professional and Career Progress of Pedagogic Employees*, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (MPC) is developing professional standards for teachers. A first version of the standards was published in 2006 with the intention of guiding teachers' professional development and included competencies for different categories (teachers, vocational teachers, after-school co-ordinators etc.) and stages (beginning teacher, independent teacher, teacher with first / second certification) of the teaching career. The standards were focused on key competencies for good teaching. However, the use of this first version of standards for teacher appraisal processes has not been widespread.

At the request of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the MPC, a new version of the standards is currently being developed at Bratislava University in collaboration with experts in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. In total, there will be 34 standards along with new measures for key competencies. These standards will be professionally evaluated and complemented with tools that teachers can use to evaluate themselves in relation to the standards. They are scheduled to be piloted in 2013 in selected schools and will be discussed at expert conferences and stakeholder seminars throughout 2014.

The new professional standards are differentiated for the three different career stages of independent teacher, teacher with first certification and teacher with second certification. Very broadly, the competencies expected of teachers at these different career levels are defined as follows:

- **Independent teachers** handle common educational situations independently and properly.
- **Teacher with the first certification** apply innovations in their pedagogical and professional activity.
- **Teachers with the second certification** achieve expert competences in their pedagogical activity and provide guidance and counselling to pedagogical staff at their school and other pedagogical institutions.



Simultaneously, the MPC is aiming to differentiate external appraisal for career advancement according to these definitions. Appraisal for the first certification shall consider the teachers' innovation skills, creativity and self-reflection, whereas appraisal for the second certification shall be focused on research carried out by the teachers themselves and their work with other pedagogical staff, for example to become a mentor for other teachers.

The draft standards are further structured in three dimensions: *(i) the student dimension*: covers teacher professional competencies focussed on understanding of students' knowledge, characteristics and conditions for development, *(ii) the educational process dimension*: covers professional competencies focussed on processes leading to student learning and development, *(iii) pedagogic employee dimension*: covers competencies focussed on teachers' own development as representatives of the teaching profession and as school employees. The standards describe key competencies for each of these three dimensions and for each level of the teacher career.

According to the Ministry of Education, the intention is to develop an intertwined system for the internal and external evaluation of teachers. The teaching standards would be applied in both processes and the standards would also be used for school self-evaluation and school inspections.

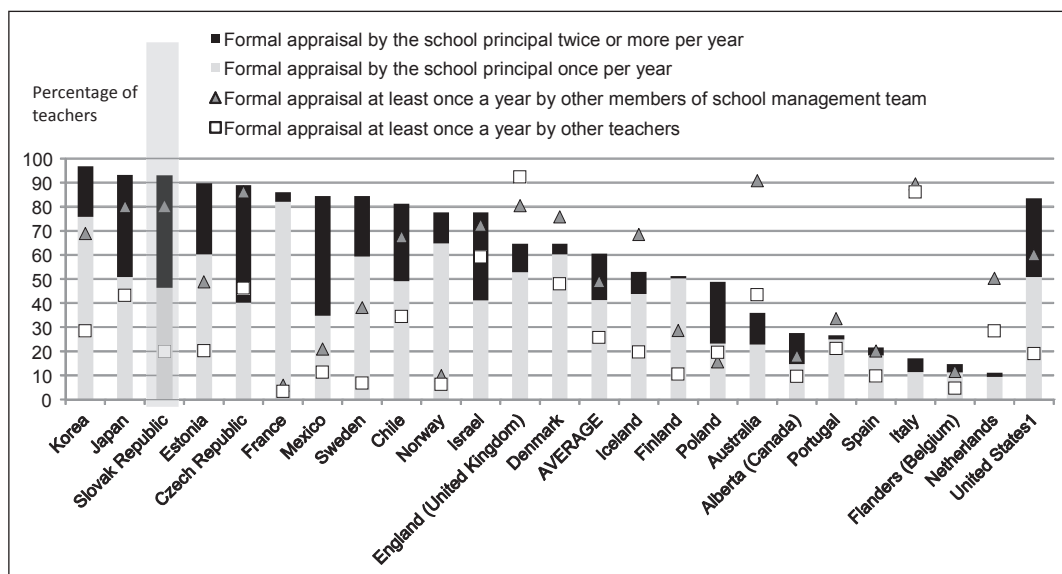
### ***The observation and improvement of classroom practices is at the heart of regular teacher appraisal***

One of the strengths of the Slovak approach to internal teacher appraisal is its focus on the observation of classroom practice. While school directors vary in their approaches to teacher appraisal, it appears that they typically operate an approach whereby they observe the classroom practice of each of their teachers at least once a year. There are three general steps to this observation: *(i) in the preparation phase*, the teacher sets the educational goal to be achieved in the observed lesson, *(ii) in the classroom observation phase*, the observer evaluates the teacher's practice in relation to set criteria, and *(iii) in the evaluation dialogue* after the observation, the evaluator provides feedback for improvement and the teacher has an opportunity for self-evaluation. Some schools apply descriptive ratings for teachers based on the observation. The appraisal is then formalised in an observation report which is stored in the teacher's file. Besides the annual observation of each teacher, observations may also be conducted more informally throughout the year by the school director, a deputy, or the head of a subject commission. The process is strongly school-based and school-level professionals have ownership of methods and criteria.

During the OECD review visit, classroom observations were described by both teachers and school leaders as common practice and none of the interviewees questioned their utility. Results from the OECD's TALIS show that in 2013, 62% of lower secondary school principals reported that they often or very often observe instruction in the classroom, compared to an international average of 49% (Table 3.2, OECD, 2014). While annual internal appraisal was made mandatory in 2008, it is based on a long-standing tradition of classroom observations within schools. Results from the equivalent survey in 2007-08 indicate that teachers in the Slovak Republic already benefitted from very regular feedback from their school leaders (OECD, 2009).<sup>2</sup> The 2013 international data indicate that formal appraisal is an established practice in Slovak schools and that formal appraisal is more frequent and established compared to in other OECD systems (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1 Formal appraisal for lower secondary teachers**

Frequency and source of formal teacher appraisal reported by school principals (TALIS 2013)



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of percentage of teachers whose principal reported he/she formally appraised teachers at least once per year. Average is for the systems presented in the figure.

1. Response rate too low to ensure comparability.

Source: OECD (2014), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>

According to NÚCEM (2012), feedback should be primarily motivational for the teacher. Teachers interviewed by the OECD review team typically described appraisal through classroom observations as non-threatening and non-competitive. The role of financial rewards connected to such appraisal appeared to be limited. School leaders reported that they tried to provide a financial bonus for excellent teachers, but that they were restrained by the limited availability of funding. As a result, internal appraisal was often referred to as “moral appraisal”, i.e. as having mainly a feedback function, helping to recognise a teacher’s strengths and suggesting ways to address identified weaknesses.

The improvement focus of internal appraisal is reflected by its close connection to professional development planning. Typically, the end-of-year appraisals by the school leader feed into a professional development plan for the school. Schools are required to submit these professional development plans to their founders at the beginning of the following school year. Based on an analysis of needs reported by schools; MPC and other professional development providers are expected to create professional development programmes that aim to develop the competencies required by schools.

### ***A traditional focus on observing, coaching and mentoring beginning teachers***

The traditional focus on particularly observing and supporting beginning teachers is a strength of the Slovak approach. According to Eurypedia (2012), beginning teachers undergo an induction programme organised within the school, typically in co-operation with the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre or other central education agencies. As part of induction, they are assigned a more experienced colleague as a mentor. The role of

mentor teacher is compensated with additional pay during the mentoring period. The mentor can observe the teachers' classroom interactions, model effective teaching approaches, and provide advice on matters such as pedagogy, assessment and administration.

In OECD TALIS 2013, 83% of Slovak lower secondary teachers were reportedly in schools with a formal induction programme for new teachers, compared to the international average of 66%; and 82% reportedly were in schools with informal induction activities, compared to 77% internationally (Table 4.1, OECD, 2014). Sixty per cent of teachers reported that they had taken part in a formal induction programme, compared to 49% internationally. However, according to reports by Slovak school principals, since results in OECD TALIS 2007-08, there appears to be greater emphasis for formal induction only for teachers new to teaching and less so for established teachers newly recruited to a school. In 2013, 47% of teachers were in schools that reportedly only offered formal induction to teachers new to teaching and 36% where formal induction was offered to all new teachers to the school (Table 4.1, OECD, 2014). In 2007-08, 62% of teachers were reportedly in schools where all new teachers to the school undertook a formal induction process (against a TALIS average of 45%) (OECD, 2009).

Mentoring is well established in Slovak schools. In 2013, 82% of teachers were in schools where the principal reported there was a mentoring system for teachers, compared to 74% internationally; and such mentors most of the time taught the same subject as the teachers being mentored (Table 4.3, OECD, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Also, 40% of lower secondary teachers reported that they had undertaken mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching as part of a formal school arrangement over the past 12 months, compared to 30% internationally (Table 4.9, OECD, 2014).

The schools visited by the OECD review team had different approaches to mentoring for beginning teachers. It typically involved observations and support by a specific mentor teacher or supervisor responsible for a new teacher during the first year on the job, and in some cases also the second year. Some schools also reported that mentoring took place during the school holidays. In addition, school directors reported that they more often undertook classroom observations for younger teachers.

### ***School-based regular appraisal is complemented with external appraisal of teachers***

Teacher appraisal that is mostly internal to the school has the advantage of giving the school ownership of the process and ensures that the school context is taken into account. However, for more summative teacher appraisal processes that have an impact on the teacher's career or salary advancement, there is a case for using national framework and standard procedures as well as an external component to validate the process and ensure objectivity and fairness (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). In this context, the existence of an external process to appraise teachers to reach the first and second certification levels is a positive aspect of the Slovak approach to teacher appraisal. The existence of a career structure for teachers together with an appraisal and certification process provides teachers with opportunities for promotion and for diversification. It allows teachers to benefit from meaningful career opportunities and may contribute to recognising and rewarding strong performance. At the same time, there are concerns about the fact that the certification process is disconnected from classroom practice and does not include observation of actual teaching (more on this below).

### ***There are links between teacher appraisal and school evaluation***

As school evaluation and teacher appraisal both aim to maintain high standards and improve teaching and learning, there are likely to be great benefits from synergies between the two processes. In the Slovak Republic, the inspectorate has a strong focus on classroom observations. There is a unified classroom observation sheet applied by inspectors across the country with a focus on teachers' key competencies. Even though the purpose is not to evaluate individual teachers, feedback is provided to each teacher after the classroom observation. The inspectorate also provides an external check of whether school leaders implement teacher appraisal approaches as required by the legislation. It is part of the inspectorate's role to evaluate whether schools have established criteria for teacher appraisal and can provide evidence that teachers are being appraised regularly. At the same time, there is no evidence that the inspectorate actually looks deeply into school leaders' appraisal practices rather than just checking that administrative requirements are met (see Chapter 4).

## **Challenges**

### ***A multitude of teaching standards and criteria for appraisal may send conflicting messages***

Currently in the Slovak Republic there is no commonly agreed understanding of what constitutes good teaching practice. The national teaching standards that have been developed by MPC in 2006 are not widely used and the existence of these standards has not been well communicated.

There exist several different approaches to appraising teachers' competencies: the internal evaluations conducted by school leaders, the certification examinations, the credit system and the system of specialisation for particular roles. In addition, there are also classroom observations by the inspectorate. However, these different approaches are not unified by the use of a consistent set of standards of good teaching practice.

In practice, while the MPC's 2006 standards may or may not be used to inform specific appraisal processes, different actors have developed a multitude of different standards and criteria for the different appraisal purposes. For teacher appraisal at the end of the induction period, there are specifically defined criteria determined in a document called *Starting Plan of Beginner Teachers*. For regular school-based appraisal for performance management, the Ministry of Education provides appraisal forms that are available in educational literature and the website of the Ministry of Education. Schools may use the criteria as they are, modify them to suit the school's specific context, or create their own criteria. There is no obligation for schools to use these forms and as a result of schools' autonomy in developing their own systems, little is known nationally regarding the actual aspects appraised and criteria used across schools for teacher appraisal. There are likely to be large variations in the way appraisal is implemented across schools.

For external appraisal for certification, there are no particular national standards available to guide the process and help teachers understand what is expected of them. Finally, for appraisal for specialisation (allowing teachers to specialise for specific types of positions), the criteria are set by education providers who appraise teachers upon completion of a professional development programme. The situation is further

complicated by the fact that the inspectorate has developed its own set of criteria for classroom observations, which is not publicly available.

The existence of a multitude of different standards and criteria risks sending conflicting messages about what is considered good teaching in the Slovak Republic. As a result, the different appraisal processes are likely to be perceived as disconnected processes teachers have to undergo which do not align to form a coherent whole. There also appeared to be a lack of involvement and leadership of the teaching profession itself in defining teaching standards. In the interviews with the OECD review team, both the teacher unions and the Chamber of Teachers deplored the absence of national professional standards and criteria for teaching, but neither of these groups considered it their role to actively develop such standards or other professional support for teachers.

### ***Concerns about the appraisal competencies of school leaders***

While the current system makes it compulsory for school leaders to appraise their teachers on a written basis, there appear to be wide variations in the quality and rigour of judgements made by school leaders about teacher performance. Some teachers voiced concerns that in the absence of widely used teaching standards, there is a risk of potential bias or arbitrariness of teacher appraisal implemented by school directors, especially where the focus is not only on the teachers' performance but also on their personality.

The OECD review team formed the impression that there was not yet a culture of school leaders being perceived as “pedagogical leaders” who are involved in shaping and guiding the actual teaching and learning processes in the school. In teacher appraisal, there appeared to be concern to document the appraisal process and create the mandatory professional development plans, but there is a risk that the focus is more on the administrative and bureaucratic aspect of the process than on the core aim of improving teaching and learning, and ultimately, student outcomes. One of the reasons why school leaders may not engage in pedagogical leadership is a lack of time due to other pressing budgetary, administrative and human resource management tasks that they are responsible for.

Some stakeholders also mentioned concerns about the quality of professional development for school directors, which remains focussed more on administration than on the pedagogical aspects of their work. According to the Country Background Report prepared for this review, the programmes provided by MPC do not sufficiently address the educational needs of school leaders as evaluators. While teacher appraisal is covered in the overall functional education programme for school leaders, there are no specialised educational programmes that deal with teacher appraisal in more depth. The topic of teacher appraisal is also marginal in the programmes of other providers (universities, private providers) (NÚCEM, 2012).

### ***External teacher appraisal appears disconnected from actual classroom teaching***

One of the main concerns around external teacher appraisal in the Slovak Republic is that it appears disconnected from teachers' actual practice and performance in the classroom. While external appraisal takes place through the credit system, the certification process and the specialisation for specific positions, none of these external processes involve an observation and evaluation of teachers' performance in the classroom.



The career advancement system is built on the obligation for teachers to accumulate credits through proof of professional learning and development. This credit system hence focuses on rewarding professional growth more than excellence and improvements in teachers' actual work. While this approach has the advantage of emphasising the importance of continuous professional development, teachers receive a pay rise for merely attending these courses rather than for proving that they are changing their practice accordingly. One unintended effect of this system is the phenomenon of "credit chasing": there were concerns that teachers try and enrol in any courses they can rather than in courses that are interesting and relevant for them and their school. Given their low salaries, teachers have strong incentives to enrol in professional development to receive a salary increase.

The certification system is focused on the preparation and defence of a theoretical piece of work (a so-called thesis) rather than evidence of actual teaching performance. This raises concern because it is difficult to tell from a written thesis whether teachers know how to apply what is outlined in the thesis and have acquired effective pedagogical skills to support the learning of their students. The appraisal for specialisation for specific positions is also disconnected from teachers' daily work as it is done by educational providers at the end of particular professional development programmes.

Overall, while classroom observations play an important part in internal appraisal, these do not inform the external appraisal of teachers or their career and salary advancement. This considerably limits teachers' opportunities to receive feedback on their work from external sources and have their achievements validated.

### ***Concern about the availability of adequate professional development for teachers***

While career advancement is predominantly based on the completion of professional development programmes, there were concerns that such programmes were not necessarily available in all the important areas of teaching expertise. Most plans and programmes are developed centrally by the MPC. These courses are automatically accredited, whereas other training providers need to apply and wait for accreditation of their programmes. According to one training provider interviewed by the OECD review team, this accreditation process can take a considerable amount of time and reduce the ability of independent providers to respond adequately to teachers' demands.

Compared to teachers in other OECD systems, Slovak lower secondary teachers in 2013 reported the lowest levels of participation (39%) in recent professional development courses or workshops – participation rates are generally quite common in other OECD systems (Figure 4.10, OECD, 2014). Teachers can participate in the MPC's courses free of charge, whereas they have to pay for courses offered by other providers. Schools do not have their own budget to choose the professional development provider and type of courses most suited for their needs.

Methodological centres only offer a set amount of training places. The teacher union reported that it is typically the school directors who choose which teachers will participate in professional development. Hence, not all teachers interested will be able to participate, which raises concerns about the fairness of the link between the credit system and career / salary advancement. With teachers having strong incentives to undertake professional development and accumulate credits, there is a risk that the MPC may not have the resources to meet these demands. Some stakeholders raised concerns about the varying levels of quality and relevance of some of the existing MPC courses.

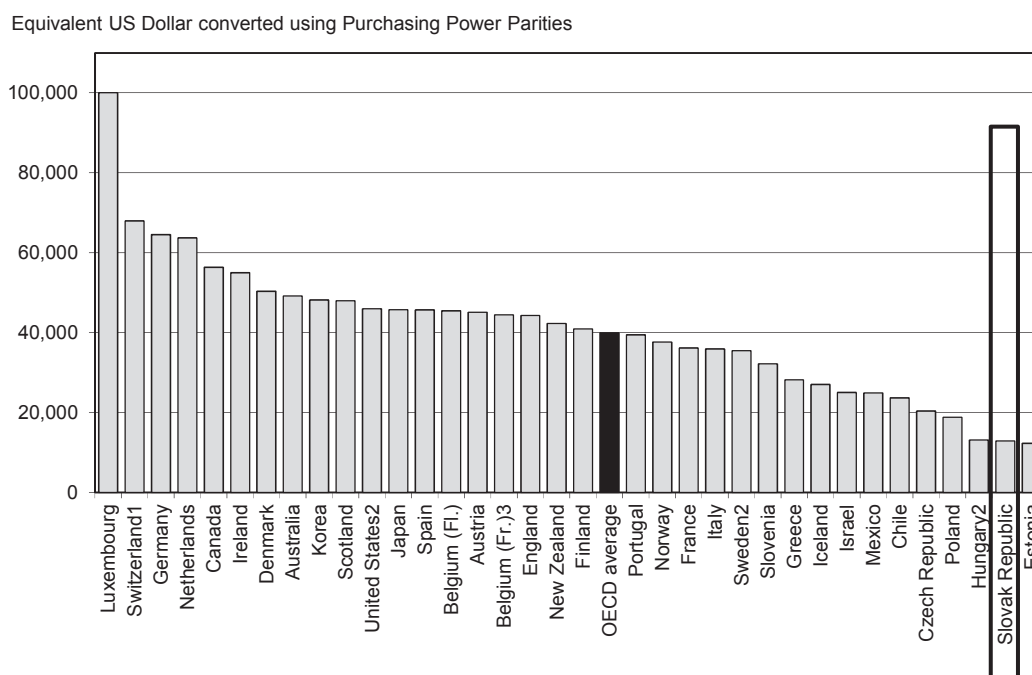


### *The socio-economic status of teachers causes concern*

Many of the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team commented on the difficult socio-economic situation of teachers in the Slovak Republic. As shown in Figure 4.2 below for the lower secondary level, the salaries of teachers (converted using Purchasing Power Parities, PPPs) in the Slovak Republic are lower than in all other OECD countries. According to stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, the starting salary of teachers appears too low to be able to support a family and the top of the salary scale is typically reached when teachers are around 57 years of age (with a retirement age of 62). The salaries and social status of teachers are also perceived to be particularly low compared to other professions in the Slovak Republic. Hence, there are difficulties in attracting young people to the teaching profession and in keeping those already on the job motivated. Teacher training bodies reported difficulties in energising the profession and preventing teacher burn-out. This difficult financial situation of teachers is likely to contribute to undermining the motivation of teachers and the potential impact of teacher appraisal. Internationally, teacher reports on how society values the teaching profession are the most pessimistic in the Slovak Republic: only 4% of lower secondary teachers reported that they agree or strongly agree that teaching profession is valued in society, compared to 31% internationally (Table 7.2, OECD, 2014). However, 90% of Slovak teachers in lower secondary education reported that they enjoyed working in their school (Table 7.2, OECD, 2014).

**Figure 4.2 Teacher salaries in lower secondary education across OECD countries**

Annual statutory teachers' salaries for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training, in public institutions (2011)



1. Salaries after 11 years of experience.
2. Actual base salaries.
3. Salaries of teachers with typical qualification instead of minimum.

Source: Chart D3.1, OECD (2013a), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>

Financial restrictions also impact on the teacher appraisal system itself. Due to the normative funding system (see Chapter 1), if there is an insufficient number of students enrolled in a school, school directors will not have a budget to provide bonuses to teachers. In this case, teacher salaries are simply paid according to basic criteria such as the teachers' years of experience and prior education, and teacher appraisal loses its incentive function. The school leaders interviewed by the OECD review team reported that resources to reward high performing teachers were very scarce. Representatives of school founders also voiced concerns that there was little interest among teachers in specialised positions such as class teacher because the increase in workload is considerable compared to a rather small financial reward.

### Policy recommendations

In light of the analysis of strengths and challenges presented above, the OECD review team recommends the following priorities in further consolidating teacher appraisal in Slovak schools:

- Consolidate a single set of teaching standards to guide appraisal processes.
- Conduct a thematic review of teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies used in schools.
- Further strengthen internal appraisal for professional development.
- Revise the career advancement system.
- Raise the status of the teaching profession.

#### ***Consolidate a single set of teaching standards to guide appraisal processes***

A framework of teaching standards is an essential reference point to guide any fair and effective system of teacher appraisal. While teacher appraisal is conducted in a variety of forms, for these processes to be effective across the system it would be important that all actors have a shared understanding of high quality teaching and the level of performance that can be achieved by the most effective teachers.

The current co-existence of the MPC's national standards, the Ministry's appraisal forms and the Inspectorate's criteria for classroom observation would benefit from being consolidated into a single set of standards so that there is a clear understanding of what is considered accomplished teaching. The current revision of the national standards is an important opportunity to bring together work that has been done at different levels to develop evidence-based criteria for teacher appraisal. It is important that the new standards build on the strengths of already existing appraisal forms and criteria developed by the MPC, the Ministry, the Inspectorate and teacher education providers in order to provide consistency between these elements rather than adding yet another set of criteria to the system.

The new standards, if they are clear, well-structured and widely supported, can become a powerful mechanism for aligning the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills. They should provide a common basis for initial teacher education, appraisal of beginning teachers, regular teacher appraisal for performance management, teacher certification, professional development and career advancement. This would provide coherence for the teaching profession and achieve better alignment between teaching standards, teacher education and teacher appraisal.

The teaching standards should be consistent with overall objectives for schooling. Teachers' work and the key competencies that they need to develop should reflect the learning objectives of the education system. The consolidated national standards should have a key focus on teacher competencies to improve learning outcomes for all students, particularly for groups where there is evidence of underperformance, such as Roma students. Teaching standards need to be informed by research and express the sophistication and complexity of what effective teachers are expected to know and be able to do.

For the teaching profession to feel ownership of the standards and for them to be relevant, it is essential that teachers are involved and encouraged to take responsibility for their development. In the Slovak context, there are different options for how the national agencies can support such involvement, for example through the organisation of stakeholder conferences, web-based consultation with teachers, and collection of examples of teacher quality criteria that are currently used in some schools. A collegiate body of key social and academic actors could establish a process to monitor implementation of the standards beyond initial agreed versions. In Portugal, for example, the Ministry of Education set up a Scientific Council for Teacher Evaluation as a consultative body to supervise and monitor the implementation of teacher appraisal (Santiago et al., 2012). It is also important to establish appropriate feedback mechanisms and periodically review and revise the national standards to ensure their continued relevance to promoting teacher professionalism (OECD, 2011).

It is important that the standards are clear and make sense to teachers. Extensive socialisation of the standards should happen at several stages of a teacher's career: during initial teacher education so that they have a clear understanding of what is expected from them; in induction and mentoring to ease the transition between initial education and school practice; and through professional development that specifically regards the use of standards and their implications for classroom practice (NBRC, 2010; OECD, 2010).

### ***Conduct a thematic review of teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies used in schools***

In the development of national standards, a great deal can be learnt from practice-based expertise and the various sets of criteria and methodologies for teacher appraisal that have been developed across schools. One way of taking this forward in the Slovak context would be for the Inspectorate in collaboration with MPC to conduct a thematic review on teacher appraisal in a national sample of schools. Through such a programme of reviews, MPC, together with the Inspectorate and possibly university researchers, could design, trial and refine the national teaching standards while also building capacity for more rigorous teacher appraisal within the schools involved.

While the main aim would be to learn from schools about the types of criteria and methodologies for appraisal that have worked well and provide some external quality assurance for these, an important focus should also be on building capacity to strengthen teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation across the country. Such a thematic review, involving co-operation between the Inspectorate and MPC, would be an excellent way to create synergies between teacher appraisal and school evaluation by connecting the evaluation of classroom teaching to the evaluation of overall school quality.

### *Further strengthen internal appraisal for professional development*

The well-embedded tradition for classroom observation by the school leadership team is a key strength of the Slovak approach to teacher appraisal. It can help teachers develop their competencies by recognising the strengths on which they can build and identifying weaknesses that can be addressed by suitable professional development. The current system for internal appraisal benefits from a non-threatening evaluation context, individual objective-setting, simple evaluation instruments and formal links to professional and school development. This emphasis on regular classroom observations should be maintained and strengthened. Some elements should be further enhanced to ensure that internal appraisal leads to improvement.

### *Enhance school leaders' appraisal and evaluation competencies*

The effectiveness of internal teacher appraisal depends to a large extent on the way school leadership is established in schools. School leaders are well placed to play the key role in internal teacher appraisal, given their familiarity with the context in which teachers work, their awareness of school needs, and their ability to provide rapid feedback to the teacher. The availability of “functional education” for school leaders is a positive element of school management in the Slovak Republic. However, there are concerns that the existing leadership training is insufficient to prepare school leaders adequately for pedagogical leadership, including effective appraisal of teachers.

From the interviews, the OECD review team formed the impression that functional education was focused mostly on formal elements such as developing and checking criteria, and less on providing constructive feedback on different aspects of pedagogy. There is a need to build the credibility and authority of school leaders as educational leaders so that they can operate effective observation, feedback and coaching for their teachers and lead whole-school evaluation processes. This can be done by:

- Disseminating resources and training for the direct evaluation of pedagogical practice to school leaders.
- Supporting regional leadership programmes run by the regional school authorities, drawing on the approaches and expertise developed through the national programme. These could also provide opportunities for networking and peer learning between school leaders from the same region.
- Ensuring that school leaders themselves receive adequate appraisal and feedback by building the capacity of their employers and inspectors to undertake effective performance reviews and identify those school leaders who would benefit from additional targeted support. Allow greater access for school leaders to participate in external reviews and development work with other schools in their areas or elsewhere.
- Further distributing leadership within schools among middle and senior leaders. This could include building capacity in teacher appraisal and evaluation methods by preparing not only school directors and deputies but also other members of school leadership and accomplished teachers to undertake specific appraisal and evaluation functions in the school. In this context, the provision of training opportunities regarding appraisal and evaluation could be scaled up for a wider group of school staff, including middle leaders.

*Review the offer of professional development to ensure it responds to school needs*

The OECD review team formed the view that although the current emphasis on teacher appraisal informing professional development plans is commendable and should be maintained, there is also room to further strengthen the link between internal teacher appraisal and teacher professional learning, and further develop professional development opportunities for individual teachers and schools.

Given that there is a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the current centralised system for teacher professional development, it would be helpful to review the framework for funding and provision. To diversify the offer of programmes, the decentralisation of its funding could be considered. This could be done, for example, by attributing earmarked funding training vouchers to schools so that they can freely choose the training and provider most suitable for their needs. In this context, it would be particularly important to also review the quality of the accreditation system for training providers. If the system becomes more decentralised, it will become even more essential to have a reliable system of quality evaluations in place.

***Revise the career advancement system***

The career advancement function that is currently being achieved through appraisal processes at the end of induction, credit evaluation, certification processes and appraisal for specialisation, could be brought together in a single process of teacher appraisal for career progression. This process should be associated with the existing career structure, allowing for progression within the career path as well as providing access to different specialisations and positions. Bringing together these different appraisal processes would formalise the principle of advancement based on merit, and bring together the system for both horizontal and vertical promotions.

The certification process should mainly focus on: providing public assurance with regard to teachers' standards of practice, determining advancement in the career, and providing input into the teacher's professional development plan. Access to career levels beyond "independent teacher" could be through a voluntary application process, and teachers not applying for such promotion should be required to maintain their basic certification status as independent teacher. This would involve each permanent teacher periodically (e.g. every four years) being subject to a formal appraisal for certification, or re-certification. The purpose would be to confirm the teachers as fit for the profession. The results of the certification process should influence the speed of career and salary progression (e.g. if excellent, the teacher would progress by two salary steps; if regular, the teacher would progress by one salary step; and if poor the teacher would remain in the same salary step). The certification appraisal should also constitute an opportunity to identify underperformance. For example, if a teacher performs poorly on the appraisal, a mandatory professional development plan could be established with a new appraisal required one year later. The appraisal should also open up possibilities to move on consistently underperforming teachers who have not responded to professional development opportunities (Jensen and Reichl, 2011).

The appraisal system associated with the certification process should be founded on the national framework of teaching standards. As certification is summative in nature, it should have a strong component that is external to the school to ensure comparability and fairness in the process. This element of externality could be introduced via an accredited external evaluator, who would typically be a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area as the teacher being appraised. It is important that external evaluators

receive specific training for this function, in particular in standards-based methods for appraising evidence of teacher performance and in providing constructive feedback. Teachers also need to be provided with support to understand the appraisal procedures and benefit from appraisal results. At the same time, it is important that teacher appraisal for certification takes account of the school context, including the views of the school leadership team.

For the appraisal results to reflect the teacher's overall performance, it is important to diversify the instruments used and give greater prominence to those tools that can capture the quality of teachers' practices in the classroom. Given the high stakes of appraisal for certification, decisions must draw on several types of evidence, rely on multiple evaluators and encompass the full scope of the teacher's work. Importantly, appraisal for certification should be firmly rooted in classroom observation as most key aspects of teaching are displayed when teachers interact with their students in the classroom. Other evidence of teaching approaches (such as planning documents) are also relevant to teachers' practice, but they do not hold the same central position as classroom observation. The appraisal should also involve an opportunity for teachers to express their own views about their performance and reflect on the personal, organisational and contextual factors that impacted on their teaching.

Representatives from the MPC informed the OECD review team that there are plans to radically change the approach to teacher certification. The intention is to create a complex model for teacher appraisal that would assess the three dimensions of teacher quality covered in the professional standards. The OECD review team understands that the new model would be based on a portfolio by teachers' that provides different types of evidence on their performance. The OECD review team supports this intention as a portfolio would allow teachers to mention specific ways in which they consider their professional practices are promoting student learning. It could include elements such as: lesson plans and teaching materials, samples of student work and comments on student assessment examples, teachers' self-reported questionnaires and reflection sheets (Isoré, 2009). It is important that the requirements of a portfolio are closely related to teachers' day-to-day work and the elements required should be a "natural harvest" of teachers' real work, rather than something produced in addition to their regular work. In the United States, for example, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers recognition to teachers who satisfy requirements for a portfolio submission. It is a demanding process for teachers, but those who participate find it to be a rewarding experience because the natural harvest makes the process less burdensome (Santiago et al., 2013).

### ***Raise the status of the teaching profession***

In order to ensure high quality teaching in every classroom, it is important to attract high performing individuals to the profession and help them to stay motivated for continuous improvement throughout their career. Therefore, in addition to revising specific elements of the teacher appraisal system, the Slovak Republic should continue its efforts to attract good candidates to teaching and provide the working conditions that support teachers in staying on the job and continuing to perform at a high level. In general terms, adequate working conditions, a professional environment and professional services from the authorities and teacher professional bodies as well as adequate salaries are essential to increase the attractiveness and raise the status of the teaching profession (OECD, 2005).



## Notes

1. The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey was implemented in 2007-08, covering lower secondary education and with the participation of 23 countries (OECD, 2009) and most recently in 2013, covering 34 countries or economies, maintaining the focus on lower secondary education, but with some countries opting to administer the survey also in primary or upper secondary education (OECD, 2014). The Slovak Republic chose only to administer the survey in lower secondary education. 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](http://www.oecd.org/edu/talis).
2. Across the schools participating in TALIS 2008, 71% of Slovak teachers indicated receiving appraisal / feedback from their leaders at least twice per year (highest figure across all countries, against a TALIS average of 41%) and 73% of teachers indicated receiving appraisal / feedback from other teachers or members of the school management team at least twice per year (compared to a TALIS average of 49%) (OECD, 2009).
3. In OECD TALIS 2007-08, 26% of Slovak teachers reported that there was a mentoring programme or policy by which all new teachers worked with an experienced teacher who acted as their mentor (against a TALIS average of 37%), and 71% reported that such programmes or policies existed but were restricted to those in their first teaching position (against a TALIS average of 38%) (OECD, 2009).

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