

Chapter 2

The evaluation and assessment framework

The Norwegian authorities have set up a national quality assessment system (NKVS) for the education sector in 2004. NKVS provides a range of tools and data intended to help schools, school owners and education authorities evaluate their performance and inform strategies for improvement. In less than a decade, Norway has come far in developing a national framework for evaluation and assessment while at the same time leaving considerable freedom to schools and school owners in implementing local approaches. However, NKVS lacks a clear policy document or strategic plan outlining the different elements of evaluation and assessment and the linkages between them. Also, the specific criteria to evaluate quality in education are not stated explicitly, which leads to great variability in the nature and rigour of judgments made at the local level to assess students, appraise teachers and evaluate schools. As the Norwegian approach to evaluation and assessment strongly relies on the capacities of actors at all levels, the professional development needs are large and currently only partly met.

This chapter looks at the overall framework for evaluation and assessment in Norway, *i.e.* its various components such as student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation, the coherence of the whole as well as the articulation between the different components. Following this overview, the succeeding chapters (3-6) will analyse the issues relevant to each individual component in more depth.

This report differentiates between the terms “assessment”, “appraisal” and “evaluation”. The term “assessment” is used to refer to judgments on individual student performance and achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessments as well as large-scale, external tests and examinations. The term “appraisal” is used to refer to judgements on the performance of school-level professionals, *i.e.* teachers and school leaders. Finally, the term “evaluation” is used to refer to judgments on the effectiveness of schools, school systems and policies. This includes school inspections, school self-evaluations, evaluation of municipalities, system evaluation and targeted programme evaluations.

Context and features

The national quality assessment system (NKVS)

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 intended to help schools, school owners and education authorities evaluate their performance and inform strategies for improvement. With the establishment and development of NKVS, policy makers aimed to move policy attention away from inputs and processes to focus more on the outcomes of education. The Directorate for Education and Training, created in 2004, holds responsibility for implementing NKVS at the national level.

The first elements of NKVS were national tests at key stages of education, a range of user surveys and a web-based School Portal. After a change of government, these elements were complemented by a number of tools to be used exclusively at the local and school level. The new tools included diagnostic “mapping tests” as well as the “point-of-view analysis” and “organisational analysis” tools to assist schools in their self-review. A Template tool was also developed to help school owners prepare status reports on the state of their local school systems. Table 2.1 describes the key tools that were developed to support evaluation and assessment activities in Norway since the establishment of NKVS in 2004. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011), however, “there is no uniform interpretation in the sector as to which elements are incorporated in the NKVS”.

Table 2.1 Key tools for evaluation and assessment developed since the establishment of NKVS

| Key tools | Description | Use of results by | Purpose |
|--|--|--|--|
| National tests | Mandatory for Years 5, 8 and 9. Assessments of students' basic skills in reading, mathematics and English. | National authorities School owners Schools | At the national level, results are used to inform education policy and allocation of resources towards municipalities with special challenges. At the local level, results inform school evaluation and improvement. |
| User surveys | Pupil Surveys are mandatory in Years 7, 10 and Vg1. Schools can also administer them in other years. Parent Surveys and Teacher Surveys are voluntary. | National authorities School owners Schools | Results are used at all levels to analyse and develop the learning environment. Results may also be used for research purposes. |
| Mapping tests | Available for Years 1, 2, 3 and Vg1. Assessments of basic skills in reading and mathematics. Some are mandatory and some are voluntary. | School owners Schools | Identify pupils who need extra help and adapted teaching at an early stage in their schooling. |
| Point-of-view analysis tool | Available for schools to structure a systematic review of their teaching practice and results. | Schools | Inform school self-evaluation and improvement. |
| Organisational analysis tool | Available for schools to review the school as a workplace for its staff and identify aspects that may impact teaching and learning quality. | Schools | Inform school self-evaluation and improvement. |
| Template to prepare local status reports | Available for school owners to assist them in the preparation of their annual status reports. The Template tool includes data for both mandatory and suggested indicators | School owners | Assist school owners in the requirement to complete annual status reports and strengthen education system monitoring at the local level. |
| School Portal | A web-based information tool presenting information from the national tests and the user surveys, and basic school data about enrolment, resources and completion rates. Comprises an open part and a password-protected part where schools and school owners can access their own data. | General public National authorities School owners Schools | Provide all stakeholders with access to key information on basic education at the national and local (school owner) level. Provide school owners and schools with specific information concerning their own results to inform school evaluation and improvement. |

Source: Adapted from Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011).

Key components of evaluation and assessment

The tools described above have considerably enriched and added on to the traditional approaches used for evaluation and assessment in Norway. This section attempts to give a more comprehensive overview of the essential components of evaluation and assessment in Norway, including those that are not considered part of the national quality assessment system (NKVS). In a nutshell, the Norwegian approach to evaluation and assessment can be described as consisting of the following four components:

- Student assessment:** Norway's approach to student assessment is based on a mix of teacher-based classroom assessments and central examinations. Teachers hold the key responsibility for student assessment (both formative and summative) at all levels of the school system. In Years 1-7, the purpose of classroom assessments is mostly diagnostic and formative and there are no marks assigned to students. In Years 8-10 and upper secondary education, there is greater focus on summative classroom assessment that counts towards students' overall achievement marks. Teachers may use information from the mapping tests (Years 1, 2, 3 and Vg1) and national tests (Years 4, 8 and 9) to identify basic skills areas requiring particular attention in teaching and learning. At the end of compulsory education and in upper secondary education, students are sampled to sit a limited number of centrally given written examinations and locally given oral examinations. While there are examinations in most subjects, each individual

student takes only two examinations in Year 10 and five or six examinations in upper secondary education. The marks from examinations are entered on students' school leaving certificates separately from overall achievement marks.

- **Teacher appraisal:** The national regulations state that teacher appraisal must be implemented but the processes for appraisal are not regulated by law and there are no national performance criteria or reference standards to guide the process. As the employing authorities for teachers, the school owners are free to establish their own frameworks for teacher appraisal. Many school owners delegate human resource issues including teacher appraisal to the school leaders. Each school defines its own procedures, following municipality requirements or guidelines where they exist. The most common source of feedback for teachers in Norway is an annual employee dialogue with the school leader. This performance review typically takes the form of a conversation between the school leader and the individual teacher in which issues related to teachers' responsibilities, working conditions and professional development are discussed.
- **School evaluation:** School self-evaluation is the primary method of delivering school evaluation and improvement in Norway. There is a statutory requirement for schools to undertake self-evaluation, using the data provided to them through the School Portal (see Table 2.1). The Directorate for Education and Training has developed school analysis tools for schools to help them review their practice. The school owners are required to implement a quality framework and ensure that their schools have self-evaluation processes in place. While practices vary, school owners typically operate an approach whereby they monitor results, require schools to submit annual plans and occasionally visit schools to conduct a "quality dialogue" and check compliance of school policies with regulations. There are no national systematic inspections or external reviews of individual schools.
- **System evaluation:** The Directorate for Education and Training has the major responsibility for monitoring the quality of the school system in Norway. The Directorate is responsible for NKVS and monitors quality via a range of statistical indicators and commissioned research studies. The key indicators to measure education system performance are the results from international assessments, the national tests (Years 4, 8 and 9), students' final assessments (Year 10 and Vg1, Vg2, Vg3) and the Pupil Survey (Years 7, 10 and Vg1). The major vehicles for reporting results from the national monitoring system are the Directorate for Education and Training's annual summative report on education in Norway (the *Education Mirror*) and the web-based School Portal (*Skoleporten*). The 18 County Governors are responsible for the regular inspection of school owners to ensure that they comply with legislation. Since 2006, there has also been a co-ordinated national inspection focused on school owners' systems to assess school compliance with the Education Act.

Strengths

There is strong political will to create a national framework for evaluation and assessment

In less than a decade since 2004, Norway has come far in developing a framework for evaluation and assessment. With the launch of the national quality assessment system (NKVS), the central authorities clearly communicated evaluation and assessment as a priority. They also communicated the need to build a multi-faceted *system* for evaluation and assessment rather than a number of isolated individual elements. The basic premise that evaluation and assessment are key to improving school quality has been clearly sustained through a change of government and has gathered momentum over the last years. The creation of the Directorate for Education and Training in 2004 gave prominence and coherence to the national monitoring system. The Directorate has been actively pushing a strong quality improvement agenda, establishing requirements for evaluation and assessment, as well as providing support for the sector. The national authorities have demonstrated their willingness to commit sustained funding to support the different elements of NKVS. There is also growing support at the local and school level for establishing and embedding an evaluation culture across the education sector.

Competence goals provide a basis for evaluation and assessment

In parallel to the introduction of the national quality assessment system, work was undertaken to clarify the expected learning outcomes for the education system. The Knowledge Promotion reform in 2006 introduced a new outcomes-based curriculum covering the entire school system from Year 1 through to upper secondary education. The subject curricula define competence goals in all subjects for key stages of education (Years 2, 4, 7, 10 and each year of upper secondary education) as well as goals for basic skills that should be embedded in all subjects. Within these binding goals for student achievement, the school owners and schools are given a large degree of autonomy to develop local curricula and approaches for evaluation and assessment. At the same time, greater demands were placed on school owners to monitor the quality of their schools and there are some emerging elements of external accountability for schools and school owners (Chapter 5).

Enhanced regulations aim to clarify responsibilities for evaluation and assessment

Progress has been made since 2004 in clarifying regulations and requirements for evaluation and assessment at different levels. The legal and policy requirements have been strengthened in particular regarding school evaluation and student assessment, with the intention to ensure more consistent practices across Norway. School owners have the legal responsibility to develop local quality systems and this responsibility was strengthened in 2009 by a requirement to prepare an annual status report on the situation of their schools. School leaders and teachers are responsible for classroom assessment and their role in this respect was enhanced by new regulations clarifying the objectives of continuous assessment. In particular, the new regulations make it mandatory for schools to provide formative assessment to all students and to document their formative assessment practice. The revision of regulations came along with guidance materials for

school owners, school leaders and teachers. Work was also undertaken to present the regulations in a more accessible and user-friendly way by ensuring that updated versions of all regulations are available and easy to find on the Directorate's website.

A range of tools support decentralised self-evaluation

A positive development of NKVS has been the development of a whole package of tools to support schools and school owners in their evaluation and assessment work. The development of national tests, mapping tests and user surveys provide the sector with key tools to measure student performance and well-being at different stages and for different purposes. The provision of "organisational" and "point-of-view" analysis tools helps schools in reviewing their practices. There are also tools and guidelines to help schools interpret results from national assessments and document their assessment practice. To support school owners in their evaluation processes, a Template tool for municipal status reports is available online. Taken together, these elements have the potential to provide the sector with a very powerful and comprehensive toolkit to support a decentralised system of self-evaluation and support.

The development of the School Portal has been instrumental in ensuring access for school owners and schools to monitoring information and analyses of their results. The School Portal is a web-based information tool presenting key education monitoring information including learning outcomes, learning environments, resources and basic school data. The Portal has an open part accessible to the general public and a password-protected part where schools and school owners can access more detailed information and benchmark themselves against the national average. This approach holds promise for encouraging a more systematic and well-integrated way of using analyses of data in the process of self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Local ownership and networking contribute to building collective responsibility for evaluation and assessment

Policy making in Norway is characterised by a high level of respect for local ownership and this is evident in the development of the national evaluation and assessment framework as well. School owners and schools have a high degree of autonomy regarding school policies, curriculum development and evaluation and assessment. There is a shared understanding that democratic decision-making and buy-in from those concerned by evaluation and assessment policy are essential for successful implementation. It appears that the national focus on evaluation and assessment has been well accepted at the local level. There is strong willingness in many municipalities and schools to build on the national evaluation and assessment agenda by adapting it to local needs and specificities. Many of the schools and school owners visited by the OECD review team had developed their own matrices, strategies and criteria for student assessment, teacher appraisal and school evaluation.

In such a decentralised system, it is essential that different actors co-operate to share and spread good practice and thereby facilitate system learning and improvement. Networking is a common form of organisation among municipalities in Norway and there are a range of good examples where networks and partnerships have been established between different actors as a means to take collective responsibility for quality evaluation and improvement. Networks can be a powerful organisational tool embedding reform in the interactions of different stakeholders, sharing and dispersing responsibility and

building capacity through the production of new knowledge and mutual learning that can feed back into policy and practice (Katz *et al.*, 2009; Chapman and Aspin, 2003). In Norway, there are many examples of localised collaboration initiatives launched and developed by small clusters of municipalities. In addition, there are also larger regional or national partnerships that are supported by the Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) or the Directorate for Education and Training. A range of examples are provided below.

- **Municipal networks for efficiency and improvement:** In 2002, the Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development have set up “municipal networks for efficiency and improvement” that offer quality monitoring tools for municipal use and provide a platform for municipalities to share experience, compare data and evaluate different ways of service delivery in different sectors (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011). For the education sector, an agreement has been established between KS and the Directorate for Education and Training to allow the networks to use results from the user surveys that are part of NKVS. The networks bring together municipal staff and school leaders to discuss school evaluation and assessment issues and engage in benchmarking exercises. Each network meets four or five times and then the opportunity is offered to another group of municipalities.
- **Regional groups working on external school evaluation:** The national school improvement project Knowledge Promotion – From Word to Deed (2006-2010) was launched by the Directorate for Education and Training to strengthen the sector’s ability to evaluate its own results and plan improvement in line with the objectives in the Knowledge Promotion reform. One of the outcomes of the project was the establishment of 11 regional groups to continue to work on external school evaluation. These groups received training in the programme’s methodology for external school evaluation and have begun to establish local systems for external school evaluation.
- **Guidance Corps for school improvement:** The Directorate has also recently established a “Guidance Corps” of exemplary school leaders who make themselves available to intervene in municipalities that have been targeted as needing help with capacity development (amongst others the municipalities from the “K-40” project). The “K-40 project” is a voluntary support offered to municipalities by the Directorate and seems to be a welcome initiative – of the 40 municipalities contacted, 31 decided to participate.
- **Collaboration of teacher education institutions and schools:** An important recent development is the organisation of teacher education into five regions. This regionalisation of teacher education is intended to enhance the co-operation of teacher training institutions among each other and to develop partnerships between teacher training colleges, universities and schools. Every teacher training institution is required to participate and set up partnerships with local schools. While the Directorate for Education and Training has set up the infrastructure for this co-operation, it is now up to the participating institutions to take it further.

The evaluation and assessment system is seeking continuous improvement

The national quality assessment system aims to establish a balance between accountability and improvement purposes and has shown its capacity to develop and adapt procedures striving to meet both purposes adequately. When NKVS was introduced, there was a strong focus on accountability and control but the system has been complemented relatively quickly by additional steps to provide guidance, tools and training so as to increase the usefulness of information provided to professionals (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1 Evolution of the national quality assessment system (NKVS)

Two broad phases can be described in the development of NKVS.

In the phase of its inception, the key focus of NKVS was to make actors at all levels of the education system more accountable for achieving results. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011), accountability was “an important principle that underpinned the development of the system.” The first elements of NKVS were the national tests and the School Portal, later complemented by the Pupil Survey. The original intention behind national tests was to publish the results of individual schools so as to hold schools accountable and thereby drive them to improve practices and outcomes. The first publication of test results received high attention in the press and was met with widespread criticism among stakeholders. There were concerns about the quality and scope of the assessments as well as the unintended consequences of the publication of results, such as school rankings and curriculum narrowing. The National Student Union supported a boycott of the tests and it was decided to suspend their administration for one year.

In a second phase, from 2005 onwards NKVS was maintained but the system evolved to focus strongly on school self-evaluation and improvement by providing a range of tools to be used exclusively at the local and school level. The new tools included the diagnostic mapping tests as well as the “point-of-view” and “organisational” analysis tools for schools to use in their self-review. After a one-year time out, the national assessments were re-introduced in 2007 following pilot testing and intensive work to strengthen their validity and reliability. The administration date of tests was moved to the beginning of the school year so as to emphasise their formative function and avoid the use of results to evaluate teachers. The Directorate also prepared guidelines to support teachers in using the test results to inform teaching and learning strategies. At the same time, the accountability focus was shifted more to the level of school owners, through the introduction of status reports and national inspections.

Source: Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011).

Following initial resistance to national assessments and the publication of results, the Norwegian education system has become alert to the potential dangers of going too strongly into the direction of accountability. There has been a lot of focus in recent years to shift the focus of NKVS and complement the more control-oriented features by a number of elements intended to be used exclusively for the local development work of schools. While the gradual changes and adaptations of the system have brought challenges in terms of communicating a clear and consistent vision for the evaluation and assessment framework (more on this below), these developments have demonstrated that the system is capable to learn from experience and adapt to emerging needs.

Within the national agencies, there is a high degree of self-awareness and reflection about the implementation and impact of initiatives. National reports such as the *Education Mirror* (see Chapter 6) and the Country Background Report for this OECD review (see Foreword) cite many critical evaluation studies and report in a balanced way about both strengths and challenges. The Directorate for Education and Training itself has recently created a department on internal governance to enhance continuous reflection about the uptake and impact of new quality initiatives. The department has launched an annual report in 2010 to evaluate the different instruments and initiatives developed by the Directorate. To develop its own human resources, the Directorate has introduced a professional development programme to build leadership among its staff and help them work effectively in an environment of political pressure and tensions between centrally developed processes and local expectations. Training is also organised internally to enhance effective goal-setting and strategy development within the Directorate.

Challenges

There is room to clarify reference points and criteria for quality in evaluation and assessment

The interpretation of evaluation and assessment results depends on the reference points and criteria that are used to determine the quality of the outcome or process. In Norway, the specific criteria to evaluate the quality of educational processes and outcomes are not stated explicitly. The development of some commonality and comparability of quality and performance standards across the education system is a clear challenge for the Norwegian evaluation and assessment framework. Currently, there is great variability in the nature and rigour of the kinds of judgments made at the local level to assess students, appraise teachers and evaluate schools. Many schools and school owners are coming to their own judgements in isolation with the consequent danger that they might be out-of-line and perhaps too limited in expectation in comparison with standards being applied in the best performing municipalities and schools.

The Knowledge Promotion curriculum aims to provide clear competence goals to guide local teaching and learning. However, these goals are only defined for certain years of education and it is expected that the intermediary and more specific goals are defined at the local and school level. Experience from several Norwegian projects indicates that many teachers find it difficult to translate the national competence aims into concrete lesson plans and objectives (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2011). Even for the years of education where competence goals are available, there are no national assessment criteria clarifying the level of performance required for a particular mark and there does not seem to be a shared understanding of what constitutes adequate, good and excellent performance in different subject areas. This raises concerns about a lack of consistency and fairness in the grading of students, which may impact their access to study opportunities at a higher level. There are also concerns that teachers cannot make adequate judgements for formative assessment if the objectives and criteria for learning are not clear (Chapter 3).

Similarly, teacher appraisal and school evaluation have developed in a very “bottom-up” manner with a minimum of external guidance on the quality standards or performance levels that should apply. At the national level, there is no clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. No uniform

performance criteria or reference frameworks are available against which teachers could be appraised. Some of the larger municipalities have developed their own professional standards for teachers, but they appear to be a minority. For school evaluation (both internal and external), there is also a lack of consistent quality criteria or reference standards to evaluate school outcomes and progress. Hence, there is large variation regarding the ways in which judgments about quality are being made when appraising teachers or evaluating school performance (Chapters 4 and 5).

The evaluation and assessment framework needs to be completed and made coherent

Norway deserves credit for the initiative to create a comprehensive and balanced framework for evaluation and assessment that provides monitoring information at the different levels from the classroom to the system level. Currently, however, the existing framework (NKVS) is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not visibly connect all the different elements. There is no policy document providing an overview of all the different elements that form part of NKVS and the links between them. As a result, at the frontline of delivery in municipalities and schools the different initiatives are still perceived as a set of rather separate projects rather than a comprehensive framework.

According to an evaluation of NKVS, among stakeholders there is no clear understanding of the whole system for evaluation and assessment (Allerup *et al.*, 2009). The evaluation showed that the key elements of NKVS were understood to be the national tests, user surveys, inspections and international tests. This reflects that the more accountability-oriented elements of the evaluation and assessment framework are receiving greater attention than the support and guidance tools developed by the Directorate for local use and analysis. Even though the proposal for the creation of the Directorate had clearly stated that “quality assessment should primarily be a tool to be used by teachers, schools and students in their quality development work”, the improvement function of NKVS has been less well communicated. For example, there are no indications that the focus on formative assessment has been presented as being part and parcel of NKVS.

Further work needs to be done to communicate the different elements of evaluation and assessment as a coherent framework and make sure that each element receives adequate attention. Some key components of a comprehensive evaluation and assessment framework are currently still underdeveloped:

- Teacher appraisal is not considered to be part of NKVS. Procedures to appraise teachers are entirely determined at the local level and there are no national guidelines or criteria on how to appraise teacher performance and classroom practices (Chapter 4).
- School self-evaluation is also still at an early stage of development and the approaches and competencies to implement school self-evaluation vary across schools. Despite efforts to promote self-evaluation, results from TALIS indicate that in 2009 a quarter of Norwegian teachers were in schools that had never conducted a school self-evaluation in the past five years (Chapter 5).
- External evaluation of individual schools is the responsibility of school owners and varies considerably across Norway. Many smaller municipalities lack the

capacity to develop robust local quality assurance systems, monitor schools effectively and follow up with schools accordingly (Chapters 5 and 6).

The OECD team also noted some areas where linkages and complementarities within the evaluation and assessment should be developed or strengthened more systematically:

- Student assessment in primary schools and in secondary schools: Assessment approaches and philosophies differ between primary and secondary schools, with the risk that the type of feedback and reporting that students and their parents receive is not consistent and coherent across the student's educational trajectory (Chapter 3).
- National assessments and classroom assessment practice: The national elements for student assessment are not necessarily well connected to classroom practice and the criteria teachers use for their own assessments. It is not clear how the results from national assessments feed back into teaching and assessment practice in the classroom (Chapter 3).
- Teacher appraisal, teacher professional development and school development: There is no guarantee that school leaders conduct systematic appraisals of their teachers' classroom practices and that these are followed up with adequate professional development. Teacher appraisal and professional development could also be better articulated with school development priorities (Chapter 4).
- Teacher appraisal and school evaluation: As self-evaluation processes vary a lot between schools, they do not necessarily review and evaluate teacher effectiveness and whether teacher appraisal processes are adequate. Also, in the Template for municipal quality reports, no attention is paid to teacher appraisal and there is no guarantee that municipal evaluation of schools will address teacher appraisal processes (Chapters 4 and 5).
- School evaluation and school improvement: School self-evaluation and external evaluation do not systematically focus on improving the core business of teaching and learning. While there are encouraging developments of schools collecting and analysing data, there is little tradition of responding to data in a strategic and systematic way to evaluate and improve the school as a whole (Chapter 5).
- Municipal and national evaluation processes: The County Governors have responsibility for conducting local and national inspections of public school owners, but there are great differences in how inspections are carried out by the County Governors' offices and it is not clear to what extent the Directorate systematically monitors and follows up on major outcome measures in the national monitoring of municipalities (Chapter 6).

There are variations in capacity for implementing the evaluation and assessment framework

As the organisation of education is highly decentralised in Norway, there are variations in the implementation of national policy for evaluation and assessment at the local level. This has both advantages and drawbacks. The diversity of approaches to evaluation and assessment allows for local innovation and thereby system evolution and the large degree of autonomy given to the local and school level may generate trust, commitment and professionalism. At the same time, there are concerns about those

school owners and schools that have little capacity or commitment to developing quality frameworks.

According to the Education Act, municipalities must have personnel in their administration who have qualifications in education. However, depending on the size and organisation of municipalities, this is not always the case (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). There is little information nationally regarding the qualifications of municipal education staff, but it seems a clear challenge for smaller municipalities in Norway to recruit staff with specific expertise in education. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011), many municipalities have actually “downsized their educational expertise in recent years” (p. 22).

In several parts of Norway, especially in the smaller and more rural municipalities, it seems unrealistic to expect that individual school owners would be able to acquire and sustain the expert capacity to design effective curricula and mount a comprehensive school evaluation and improvement system on their own. Despite the fact that many municipalities are very small and losing population, there have been few mergers of municipalities. While the government provides financial incentives to support the merger of small municipalities, such mergers remain voluntary and are not an explicit government policy (OECD, 2010). According to the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, many municipalities face challenges in local curriculum development and spend a lot of time in setting goals and developing curricula. The *Report to the Storting* No. 31 on *Quality in School* indicates that the Knowledge Promotion reform may have placed too high demands on the local level in terms of developing local curricula and assessment policies.

Capacity challenges are also evident at the school level. While there are certainly examples of school leaders exemplifying strong leadership for quality evaluation and improvement, there are challenges in building up the capacity of Norway’s full cohort of school leaders. Results from TALIS indicate that school leaders in Norway have traditionally focused more on an administrative role rather than systematically leading teaching and learning processes, giving feedback to teachers and implementing whole-school evaluation processes (Chapter 5). Teachers, in turn, also vary in their capacity to implement multi-faceted assessment approaches, make consistent judgements of student performance and provide effective feedback to students and parents (Chapter 3).

At all levels of the education system, there is room to strengthen the capacity in using evaluation and assessment data in a purposeful, strategic and systematic way to direct changes in schools and classrooms. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, (2011) “there is not much of a system for processing the information in ways that provide greater insight and create interest between the professional groups and politicians in each municipality” (p. 22). The use of data is often ad hoc at the particular point of time that test results are received by the schools, but there is not yet much sense of using data in a holistic way, pulling together data from different sources to inform strategies at the school and classroom level (Chapter 5).

Policy recommendations

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 at different 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:

- Refine and expand the national competence goals that are provided in subject curricula and provide clearer guidance concerning expected learning progressions and criteria for assessment in different subjects. At the same time, it is important to provide guidance and strengthen local capacity to translate national competence goals into local curricula, teaching programmes and assessment approaches. Collaboration among teachers, schools and school owners should be enhanced so as to ensure moderation processes and enhance consistency in terms of expected student performance (Chapter 3).
- 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. The teaching standards should contain quality criteria for professional teaching practice and should be applied in individual performance appraisals. For the teaching standards to be relevant and “owned” by the profession, it is essential that the teaching profession takes the lead in developing and taking responsibility for them (Chapter 4).
- Establish a national programme to develop an agreed framework of process quality indicators for school evaluation, which could then be made widely available to schools and school owners to use in their own evaluative processes. One way of taking forward the development of a clearer set of national quality standards would be to develop a national sample programme of external reviews of schools. Such a programme could both develop and refine the quality indicators required while also building capacity and skills for more rigorous self-evaluation within the municipalities and the schools involved (Chapter 5).

To be effective in driving up quality, indicators of quality need to be clear and coherent – at the national level, in school processes and classroom practice. Therefore it is important that the teaching standards and quality indicators for school evaluation are aligned with the national curriculum and the competence goals. They should be framed in the context of the overall objectives for schooling. School processes and competency descriptions for school professionals should reflect the learning goals that the school system is aiming to achieve.

To this end, it is also important to make the goals for high quality education outcomes and processes as specific as possible. For student assessment, this should involve the development of exemplars illustrating different levels of student performance and

mastery. For teacher appraisal, it means that the system not only needs to define levels of performance to achieve but also to develop qualitative criteria for teaching practice, describing, for example, what excellent assessment practice looks like. For whole-school evaluation activities, it would be helpful to provide examples of a high quality curriculum or assessment criteria for actual subjects and subject areas. Such examples and illustrations would give professionals resources to draw from while leaving freedom for the local level to design their own assessment and evaluation approaches.

Complete the evaluation and assessment framework and strengthen coherence between its components

The establishment of NKVS and its various elements provides Norway with a strong basis to develop a comprehensive national framework for evaluation and assessment. However, as described above, there is a need to communicate more clearly that the different elements of evaluation and assessment are not isolated but form a coherent whole. Some elements and the linkages between them are still underdeveloped. To go further, it would be important to develop a strategic plan or framework document that sets out to complete the evaluation and assessment framework and to strengthen coherence between its different elements.

Provide an overview or “mapping” of the different elements of evaluation and assessment

This should involve the development of an overview of all the different elements that constitute the Norwegian approach to evaluation and assessment. This overview should be comprehensive and provide a mapping of all the key aspects of evaluation and assessment, including those that are currently not perceived as being part of NKVS. The framework should cover the key elements of evaluation and assessment – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation. It should emphasise that a comprehensive framework includes both formative and summative elements, and school-internal as well as external components. For each of the key components of the evaluation and assessment framework, the national authorities could describe and provide links to the relevant reference standards (see above) and existing tools to support implementation.

Strengthen key components of evaluation and assessment that are still underdeveloped

Starting from the mapping document (see above), the Directorate together with key stakeholders should work to identify the components that are still underdeveloped in the current framework. As discussed above, teacher appraisal and school evaluation require particular attention in order to complete the evaluation and assessment framework. As many studies indicate that classroom teaching is the most important school-level factor impacting on student outcomes (OECD, 2005; Pont *et al.*, 2008), it is essential that the appraisal of teaching practices becomes an integral part of the evaluation and assessment framework. The main focus should be on developmental teaching appraisal that focuses on classroom practices, is internal to the school and is systematically followed up with teacher professional development opportunities to improve teaching practices (Chapter 4).

Ensure that the different elements of evaluation and assessment are appropriately interlinked

The process of developing a strategic plan for evaluation and assessment should also provide an opportunity to rethink the links between different evaluation components. For example, there is room to reinforce articulations between teacher appraisal, teacher professional development and school evaluation. This implies that school evaluation should comprise the monitoring of teaching and learning quality and possibly involve the external validation of school-based processes for teacher appraisal, holding the school leader accountable as necessary. To make the system coherent, it is important that the learning goals to be achieved are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other evaluation and assessment activities align to work towards these goals.

Continue to build capacity and partnerships to support implementation

Building a comprehensive framework for evaluation and assessment is an important culture shift in Norway that takes time and requires a high degree of professional learning at different levels of the system. Norway has already taken various steps to increase the offer of professional development at different levels, through including a focus on student assessment in pre-service training for teachers (Chapter 3) and providing continuing professional development offers for teachers, school leaders and school owners (Chapters 3, 4, 5). These steps are commendable and need to be sustained to further reduce variations in the quality and effectiveness of practices at the local and school level.

The international research literature has consistently shown that professional development is an essential component of successful school development and teacher growth, well being, and success (Day, 1999). It has confirmed that where teachers are able to reflect, access new ideas, experiment and share experiences within school cultures, and where leaders encourage appropriate levels of challenge and support, there is greater potential for school and classroom improvement. Improving schools are able to invest in the development of their staff, and create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and to share best practice (Muijs and Lindsay, 2005).

Target capacity building to the different needs of stakeholder groups

As the Norwegian education system is highly decentralised and relies on the evaluation and assessment capacities of diverse actors, it is important that capacity building responds to the diverse needs of different stakeholders including school owners, school principals and teachers. For school owners, an area of particular importance is to develop the capacity to understand, interpret and make decisions based on evaluative information from their schools. Conversely, for school leaders and teachers, it means developing the capacity to collect and analyse information for self-improvement and to report on student learning to school owners, students and their parents in effective ways without oversimplifying the complex issues involved in student learning. Exemplars of good practice in data analysis, reporting and communication should be provided nationally to make sure some minimum requirements in reporting are met.

Build on existing initiatives and practice-based expertise to support professional learning

In an upcoming book, Timperley (2011) describes the difference between professional development and professional learning. Over time, the term “professional development” has taken on connotations of delivery of some kind of information to teachers in order to influence their practice whereas “professional learning” implies an internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge through interaction with this information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings. In Norway, there is little tradition of large-scale delivery of professional development, but teachers and educational leaders in Norway have engaged in professional learning through many different activities and networks, and they have developed a variety of evaluation and assessment approaches at the local level.

Norway is well-positioned to establish a coherent framework for professional learning that builds on the various existing initiatives to create a wide range of sites for professional learning. To make the existing offer of learning opportunities and networks more transparent and accessible to schools, it would be important to take stock of what already exists and map the various types of evaluation and assessment expertise in Norway. The mapping should include existing networks, projects and knowledge centres across the country. This inventory can help provide an overview of the existing resources, both in terms of human expertise and available tools and materials. It can also be useful in identifying gaps in the support offer. An overview of available learning resources should be included in or linked to the overall strategic plan for evaluation and assessment (see above).

There is also room for the system to benefit to a higher degree from practice-based expertise and from the many innovative practices that have already been developed at the local level. The national agencies could play a greater role in disseminating and sharing effective practice across schools and municipalities. School owners should be encouraged to collect examples of good practice from their schools. The national authorities, together with the Association of Local and Regional Authorities and universities, could provide guidance on how to select good examples, facilitate quality assurance of such examples, and feed evidence back to the system. One very appropriate way to learn more about effective assessment and evaluation already happening in Norway would be to conduct national thematic inspections of a sample of schools on issues such as quality teaching, effective assessment practice or effective use of data.

Strengthen regional support offers

The County Governors, in collaboration with the regional offices of the Directorate, are well placed to take a more proactive role in bringing together national initiatives and local practice. To ensure that schools in small municipalities have access to adequate external support, the County Governors could promote and support strategic partnerships between school owners and other key sources of support including the universities and university colleges. Rather than expecting each school owner to develop school improvement services on their own, Norway should consider building “shared school improvement services” offering regional support to a larger group of school owners (Chapter 5). In this approach, particular attention should be given to connecting stronger and weaker municipalities.

Even though there are good examples of school clusters working together on evaluation and assessment (and other topics), more could be done in systematically supporting partnerships of schools. To bridge the gap between compulsory and upper secondary education, it would be especially important build clusters of several primary feeder schools around an upper secondary school. This could help increase the flow of information and consistency of support for individual students through their education trajectory.

Focus in particular on building the capacity of school leadership

Capacity for evaluation and assessment needs to be built in a connected way at different levels of the education system. School leaders can play an important role in connecting the classroom, school and system level in the pursuit of improving student learning (Hopkins, 2008). Given the key role of school leadership in Norway’s decentralised education context, it is difficult to envisage either effective teacher appraisal or productive school self-evaluation without strong leadership capacity (Chapters 4 and 5). Hence, the recruitment, development and support for school leaders is of key importance to effective evaluation and assessment cultures at school. Research internationally has shown that school leadership focused on goal-setting, assessment, appraisal and evaluation can positively influence teacher performance and learning environments (Pont *et al.*, 2008).

Many principals are still inexperienced in providing educational leadership as their role has traditionally been conceived more as an administrative one. Hence, there is a need to build the credibility and authority of school leaders as educational leaders so that they can operate effective feedback, coaching and appraisal arrangements for their staff and effectively lead whole-school evaluation processes. This can primarily be achieved by redefining school leadership as educational leadership, and ensuring that the whole cohort of school leaders receives adequate training in “leadership for learning”. The establishment of the national training programme for school leaders is a very promising step in this direction (Chapter 1). Going further, it could be helpful to consider developing training offers that are targeted to different stages of a school leaders’ career such as aspiring leader (teachers with leadership ambitions), middle or deputy leader, beginning leader, experienced leader and system leader (Pont *et al.*, 2008).

Alongside extension of access to the national development programme, other elements of a national strategy might include:

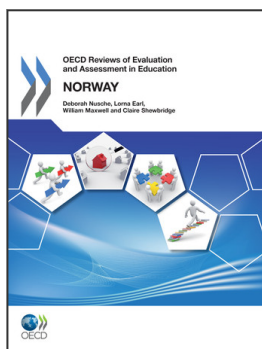
- Support for regional leadership programmes, drawing on the approaches and expertise developed through the national programme, run by municipalities individually or collectively;
- Refined statements of the core competences expected of school leaders with recruitment directly targeted on these competences;
- Support for school owners on how to undertake effective performance review of school leaders against the competences and provide additional support for those school leaders who would benefit from it;
- Greater access for school leaders to participate in external reviews and development work with other schools in their areas or elsewhere; and

- broad dissemination to school leaders of the resources and skills for whole-school self-evaluation, including the direct evaluation and improvement of instructional practice.

In broad terms, the “culture” of school leadership needs to be shifted significantly. It needs to shift so that, across Norway, school leaders grasp the autonomy afforded to them to provide effective “leadership for learning”, maximise the extent to which front-line teaching practice is being continuously improved, and thereby secure the best quality outcomes for all learners.

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