OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

# Romania

Hannah Kitchen, Elizabeth Fordham, Kirsteen Henderson, Anne Looney and Soumaya Maghnouj

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# 2017

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Anne Looney and Soumaya Maghnouj

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# *Foreword*

Romania's education system has made significant improvements in recent decades, not least in terms of student learning outcomes and strengthening institutional capacity. These improvements make Romania a regional leader. They also provide the foundations to further improve quality and equity, so that all young Romanians have the chance to reach their full potential and realise their aspirations.

This review was undertaken by the OECD with the support of UNICEF at the request of, and in close collaboration with the Romanian Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research. Focused on the assessment and evaluation system for Romania's schools, it provides recommendations to help the country capitalise on the positive practices that it has already put in place, so that they have the support and visibility to flourish and enable positive change across the education system. It encourages Romania to put student learning at the heart of evaluation and assessment. This will mean moving towards a system where assessment is not used only to measure and reward performance but as the basis for discussion and feedback. This will provide students, teachers, schools and policy makers with the information, space and professional advice to be able to reflect critically on their work and identify what they can do better in the future.

The review is the first time that the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills and UNICEF have come together to work in this way. This co-operation has meant that the review has been able to benefit from our organisations' complementary experience and expertise to provide an analysis that is sensitive to the history and context of evaluation and assessment in Romania's education system while drawing on international research and best practice from around the world.

Above all though, we hope that this co-operation provides useful recommendations that will help Romania enhance its evaluation and assessment system so that it raises the learning outcomes of all its students. This report comes at an important moment for Romania, as it is considering a new law on education with the potential to bring significant change. We hope that its recommendations can inform this process, and help to develop an education system that provides excellence for all.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **ARACIP** | RomanianAgencyforQualityAssuranceinPre -University Education |
| **ARACIS** | RomanianAgencyforQualityAssuranceinHigherEducation |
| **CSI** | CountySchoolInspectorate |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **GDP** | GrossDomesticProduct |
| **ICT** | InformationandCommunicationTechnology |
| **ID** | Identifier |
| **IES** | InstituteofEducationalSciences |
| **IRT** | ItemResponseTheory |
| **ISCED** | InternationalStandardClassificationofEducation |
| **MNESR** | MinistryofNationalEducationandScientificResearch |
| **NCAE** | NationalCentreforAssessmentandExaminations |
| **NCVETD** | NationalCentreforTechnicalVocati onalEducationandTraining Development |
| **NGO** | Non-GovernmentalOrganisation |
| **NIS** | NationalInstituteofStatistics |
| **OECD** | Organisation for EconomicCo -operationandDevelopment |
| **PIRLS** | ProgressinInternationalReadingLiteracyStudy |
| **PISA** | Programmefor InternationalStudentAssessment |
| **ROSE** | RomaniaSecondaryEducationProject |
| **SIIIR** | IntegratedInformationSystemforEducationSysteminRomania |
| **TALIS** | TeachingandLearningInternationalStudy |
| **TIMSS** | TrendsinInternationalMathematicsandScienceStudy |
| **UNICEF** | UnitedNationsInternationalChildren'sEmergencyFund |
| **VET** | VocationalEducationandTraining |

# Executive summary

Romania's education system has made significant progress in recent decades, strengthening institutions and improving students' learning outcomes. Although it enables some of its students to excel, many more are not mastering basic competencies and nearly one-fifth leave school before completing upper secondary education. Creating an education system where all students access quality education and are supported to do their best will raise attainment and improve learning, supporting individual well-being and national growth.

This report looks at the design and practice of student assessment, teacher appraisal, and school and system evaluation in Romania, focusing on how they can enhance student learning. Romania has many positive evaluation and assessment practices. It is trying to encourage more individualised, formative teaching practices, it has established an independent school inspectorate, enabling the development of expertise in school evaluation, and it is improving the breadth and quality of its data collection. Yet the continued dominance of national examination results and limited focus on self-reflection and development as part of school evaluation or teacher appraisal means that these positive aspects are unable to flourish and foster the positive system-wide changes Romania needs.

Romania is currently implementing an ambitious new curriculum, focused on student-led learning and the development of key competencies. It has the potential to catalyse a deep transformation in what is valued and taught in the country's classrooms. Strengthening the evaluation and assessment system to set high expectations for all students and make space for formative practices that support students, teachers and schools to develop, is crucial to achieving this potential, and to creating a more equitable education system where all students can access high-quality education.

## *Student assessment: Putting learning at the centre*

High-stakes examinations dominate student assessment in Romania, reducing space for learning and promoting a narrow definition of success. Putting learning at the centre of assessment will help to rebalance it, to recognise the abilities and interests of all students and enable them to do their best.

Romania must strengthen its curriculum learning standards, to encourage the changes in teaching and learning the new curriculum aspires to. Learning standards should be more clearly articulated, with examples of student work, so that teachers can consistently exercise professional judgements about student learning. The negative consequences of the current national examinations for students' learning, motivation and progression make improving their quality important. As a first priority, Romania should improve the quality and fairness of the Grade 8 examination, given its high stakes for students' future education. In the future, Romania should review the pathways and certification in secondary education, including considering ending the Grade 8 examination.

Romania's teachers need more support to reliably assess student work, and to provide students with the feedback and support they need. Teachers also need to have the space to exercise their judgement. It will be critical to upgrade new teachers' theoretical and practical education in assessment and to ensure that professional development focuses more on developing assessment practice, especially in formative methods. Revising national assessments to create more space for teacher-led test design, with central support, will help to progressively develop teachers' assessment literacy.

As with many areas of Romania's education system, insufficient investment has hindered its ability to keep up with international developments. It will need adequate and sustained investment in modern test design to achieve the changes recommended in this report.

### *Teacher appraisal: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers' professional development*

Romanian teachers undergo many appraisals throughout their career. However, the system is not as effective as it could be in identifying promising candidates, recognising and rewarding the competencies that are essential for effective teaching, or in supporting teachers to grow and develop.

Basing teacher appraisal on common professional standards will help to ensure that teachers are evaluated according to the competencies associated with good teaching. Making greater use of principals and experienced teachers as appraisers and creating more space for classroom observation, feedback and discussion will focus appraisals on the actual practice of teaching and give teachers useful input to improve.

Some of the consequences attached to appraisal undermine its ability to support teachers' development. Appraisals affect salaries and careers, and are used to grant salary bonuses. Instead, a differentiated career structure where teachers can take on different roles and responsibilities will give them incentives to develop throughout their career.

### *School evaluation: Moving from compliance to improvement*

In the last decade Romania has created the architecture of a modern school evaluation system, with an independent external evaluator and school self-evaluation. However, evaluation is still focused on compliance, and provides little support for improvement.

Romania needs to revise its framework for school evaluation to address the current proliferation of standards and duplication of effort. This should result in a single set of criteria that focus on what matters most for school improvement, and a single main external school evaluator that provides clear recommendations to schools. Creating a new school improvement unit in each county will help schools use their evaluation results to improve. Having principals lead school self-evaluation will help to raise its profile within the school and link it directly to improvement activities.

*System evaluation:*
*Using information for system improvement*

Romania now has many of the institutions and processes it needs for system-monitoring and evaluation. However, improved educational data and analysis have not played the central role they might in developing education policy, making reforms more vulnerable to reversals and changes, and undermining the system's ability to tackle persistent challenges of quality and equity.

Ensuring that the education law that Romania is now considering is based on evidence, grounded in social and political consensus and underpinned by transparent progress monitoring against measurable, time-specific targets, would help to ensure the continuity that education policy currently lacks.

Strengthening monitoring tools for student learning outcomes and equity, through a standardised assessment and collecting more contextual information on students and their learning environment will help more accurately track Romania's progress against national challenges and develop more informed policies. Finally, it is crucial that Romania invests in its analytical capacity, so it can use the information it collects to understand where and how improvements might be made and support system-wide reform.

# Assessment and recommendations

## Education and development in Romania

Romania is one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union (EU), but also one of the most unequal. Romania's growth in gross domestic product (GDP) has been consistently higher than the EU average over the last decade, unemployment is low, and investment and productivity are on the rise. However, large parts of the population, especially in rural areas, risk being left behind in the country's rapid transformation. One in four Romanians – and one in two Romanian children – is on the verge of poverty, with an income below the national threshold for an adequate standard of living. The income gap between the richest and poorest citizens is the highest in the EU. Developing a more inclusive economy is not only a matter of fairness, but will be essential to sustain national growth and competitiveness.

Ensuring that all young Romanians have equal access to high-quality education is critical for inclusive development. Romania currently enables only a minority of its students to excel. Those at the top demonstrate the same level of sophisticated knowledge and skills as their peers in other EU and OECD countries. But many more young Romanians do not master the basic competencies necessary for full participation in society. According to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), nearly half (40%) of Romanian students lack the foundational cognitive skills required for lifelong learning and productive employment (OECD, 2016). Dropout rates are on the rise, especially in rural areas, and one in five students fail to make the transition to upper secondary education, which most countries recognise as the minimum level of attainment needed in a knowledge economy. Making sure that all Romanian students complete secondary school with strong foundation skills is central for the country's continued transition towards higher levels of development and well-being.

## The role of evaluation and assessment in educational improvement

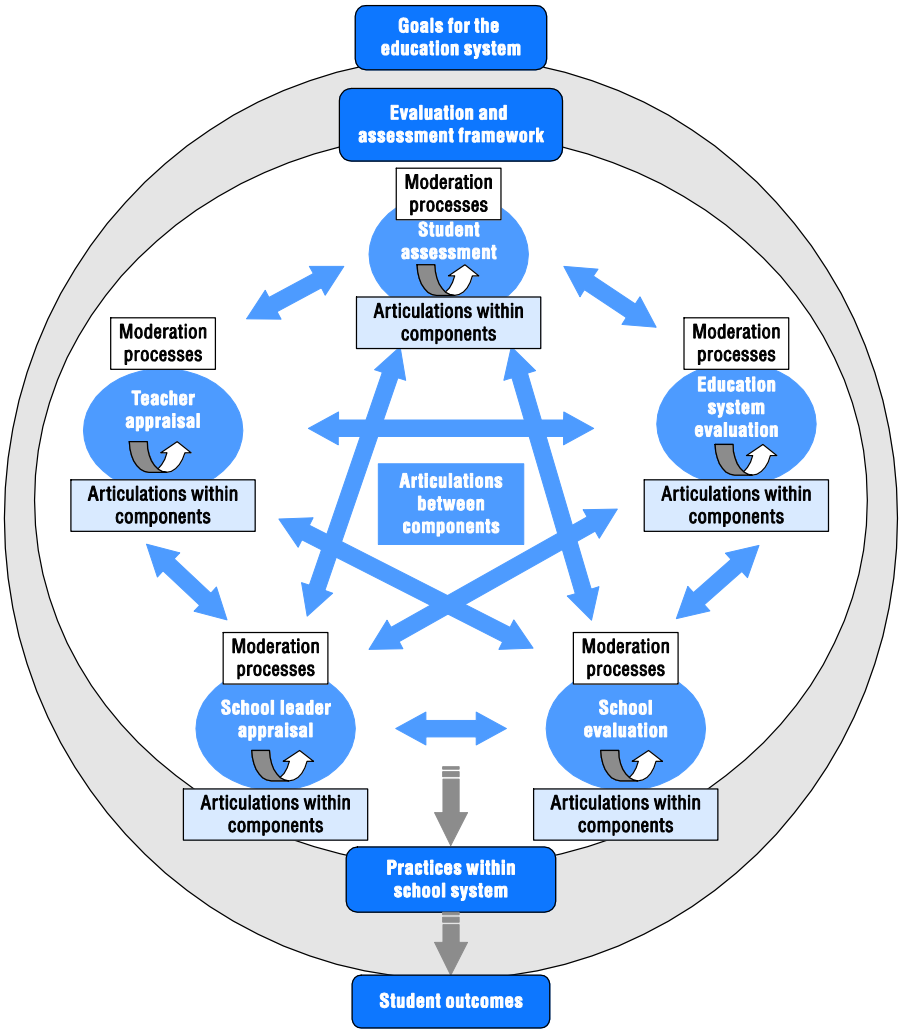
Effective education systems combine both high quality and equity, supporting all students to succeed. A well-designed evaluation and assessment system can encourage learning and inclusion in a number of ways. Most importantly for Romania, it can communicate a vision that every student, teacher and school has the potential to do well. It can ensure that policies and practices promote equally high standards of education for all children, regardless of background or location. It can also give visibility to those who are struggling and help to understand why, so that no one is left behind and all students have the opportunity to achieve good outcomes.

Importantly, by establishing regular open dialogue, reflection and feedback, where weaknesses can be acknowledged and mistakes recognised as an opportunity to learn, evaluation and assessment can help to build trust. In Romania's highly centralised education system, developing greater trust and belief in self-efficacy will be essential to

progressively move quality assurance away from government control and towards greater self-regulation and responsibility for teachers and schools. This is important to enable more autonomy and leadership for education among those who are closest to students and their learning needs.

The OECD has analysed policies and practices for evaluation and assessment in over 30 education systems to identify how they can best support student learning in different country contexts. This research shows how the different components of evaluation and assessment – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, school leader appraisal and system evaluation – can be developed in synergy to enhance student achievement in primary and secondary schools (Figure 0.1). It highlights three important hallmarks of a strong evaluation and assessment framework.

**Figure 0.1. Interactions within the evaluation and assessment framework**




*Source*: adapted from OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

The first of these is setting out clear standards for what is expected nationally of students, teachers, schools and the system overall. Countries that achieve high levels of quality and equity set ambitious goals for all, but are also responsive to different needs and contexts. The second is collecting data and information on current learning and education performance. This is important for accountability – so that objectives are followed through – but also for improvement, so that students, teachers, schools and policy makers receive the feedback they need to reflect critically on their own progress, and remain engaged and motivated to succeed.

Finally, a strong evaluation and assessment framework achieves coherence between its different components. This means, for example, that school evaluation values the types of teaching and assessment practices that effectively support student learning, and that teachers are appraised on the basis of the knowledge and skills that promote national education goals. This is critical to ensure that the whole education system is working in the same direction, and that resources are used effectively.

## Evaluation and assessment in Romania

This report looks at policies for student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation in Romania. Each chapter considers how student learning is supported and how far the needs of all students are being met. It also examines how policies are translated into practice, looking at capacity, policy coherence and the use of assessment and evaluation data. It recommends how the evaluation and assessment framework can be further strengthened so that it supports the learning objectives of the new curriculum Romania is introducing, and the wider education goals of Romania's fast-changing society.

Romania's evaluation and assessment system has developed in many positive ways since the last OECD Review of Education in Romania in 2000 (OECD, 2000). The 2011 Education Law sets out an inclusive vision, where assessment supports an individualised approach to student learning and all students receive a quality education. This vision is reflected in the new curriculum, which is focused on student-led learning and the development of key competencies, and has the potential to catalyse a deeper transformation in what is valued and taught in Romania's classrooms.

These aspirations are supported by strengthened institutional capacity. Romania now has an independent, external school evaluation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP) and an established National Center for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE) providing technical expertise for student assessment. Alongside the long-standing Institute of Educational Science (IES), these agencies are real assets for Romania, providing technical know-how and analysis. They have supported, and continue to support, educational improvement. At the same time, advances in the breadth and quality of data collection create strong foundations for system-monitoring.

But the overall framework for evaluation and assessment is not fully aligned with aspirations for a more student-focused, competency-based system where assessment serves to advance learning. The heavy weight of high-stakes national examinations leaves little space for teachers and students to develop more individualised approaches to learning. This is exacerbated by teacher appraisal and school evaluation processes that are heavily focused on accountability, and in which examination results play a significant role. Combined with the politicisation of local education leaders, and the centralisation of

the education system, this means that teachers and schools have little opportunity for open, constructive self-reflection or the resources and autonomy to lead improvements.

At present, Romania's positive practices do not have the visibility and support that they need to propel improvement across the education system. The introduction of diagnostic assessments in Grades 2 and 6, of mentors to support new teachers, and of school self-evaluation reflect positive efforts to create more formative practices, focused on feedback and self-reflection. However, the assessments and school self-evaluation remain underdeveloped and mentorships exist largely on paper only. Moreover, these practices have been developed in the absence of a shared definition of national learning expectations, what good teaching means, or what a good school looks like. This has led to Romania creating a multiplicity of assessment and evaluation processes which coexist, and frequently pull in different directions. Strengthening national learning goals, developing teacher and principal standards and a common definition of school quality would consistently direct the system towards the kinds of learning and teaching envisaged in the new curriculum (Figure 0.2). It would also provide existing good practices with the recognition that they need to drive better outcomes for students.

**Figure 0.2. Aligning evaluation and assessment in Romania to support student learning**

Greater clarity of the assessment system's goals and standards would also provide the basis for defining more clearly the roles and responsibilities of different actors. In particular, the mandates of the specialised bodies of IES, NCAE and ARACIP and the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) need to be reviewed, so that they can play to their strengths and work better together, in collaboration with a strengthened Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR) that is able to provide strategic direction for system-wide change.

Positive change will also require adequate resourcing. Education in Romania is chronically underfunded, with spending per student in primary and lower secondary less than one-third of the EU average. This review's recommendations – for strengthening teachers' formative assessment skills, developing school capacity for improvement, and creating a culture of constructive feedback and supportive guidance – are among the most efficient and effective ways in which Romania can invest additional resources to improve learning. It is also clear that without changes to assessment and evaluation practices, and in particular without measures to mitigate the impact of national examinations on the system as whole, that the other investments that Romania is currently making to reduce dropout rates and low performance are less likely to have the desired impact.

## Student assessment in Romania: Putting student learning at the centre

Student assessment supports and measures student learning. It can be summative – assessing learning that has already taken place – or formative – assessing learning as it is happening, to shape and deepen future learning. In both cases, effective assessment provides information for students, teachers and policy makers on students' level of knowledge and skills, and helps to identify improvements for learning strategies, teaching or education policies.

The desire to perform well in assessments makes their design and content a strong determinant of teaching and learning practice. Aligning assessment with national goals for student learning is therefore critical. Ensuring the different types and purposes of assessment are in balance is equally important to create the constructive interaction between teachers and students that helps students to progress and be motivated to learn.

The importance of summative student assessment is well recognised in Romania. Students are encouraged to perform well in national examinations which determine their entry to upper secondary high school and university. This focus on high performance in examinations provides students and teachers with clear objectives. However it also creates an unhelpfully narrow definition of success. It crowds out space for a more broadly-based view of learning outcomes where students with different aptitudes and interests, beyond academic achievement, can succeed. It also limits the space for teachers to exercise their professional judgement through classroom-based assessments and feedback to students, which is the basis of formative assessment, and one of the most effective ways to support educational achievement.

Romania can support better student outcomes by putting student learning at the centre of its approach to assessment. Practically, this will mean clarifying the purpose of national examinations, national assessments and classroom assessment, and their role for student learning, and ensuring that their design is consistent with this purpose. Creating a system where assessment supports learning hinges on teachers' assessment literacy,

which is currently underdeveloped in Romania. If assessment is to support learning, Romania's teachers need to be supported to exercise their professional judgement, through better education, professional development and assessment resources, and given adequate space to do so.

### *Issue 2.1: Align student assessment with the learning goals of the new curriculum*

Romania has recently adopted a new curriculum based on the eight key competencies for lifelong learning in the EU reference framework, with a view to developing students' competencies for fulfilling employment and personal well-being in the modern economy (IES, 2015). This is a significant change in the country's approach to learning, and one that many other EU and OECD countries have made in recent years. In Romania, as in most of these countries, ensuring that this change on paper leads to changes in teaching and learning has proved challenging. While Romania has embedded what students are expected to learn and be able to do in the curriculum, these expectations do not yet play the central role that they should. In particular, they do not yet seem to be understood and used by teachers when planning their teaching and assessing student learning in classrooms. The recently introduced national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 were intended to improve the reliability of teacher assessment practices in line with national standards, but they have not been accompanied by adequate supports to promote their effective use. These gaps create a significant impediment to achieving the changes that the new curriculum aspires to.

*Recommendations*

**2.1.1. Strengthen the curriculum's learning standards in the core domains of reading and writing, and mathematics** so that they become the key reference for classroom and external assessment, supporting alignment with the curriculum (Figure 0.3). This should include providing marked examples of student work that demonstrate national expectations. Using the current scales for classroom marking to set out levels of performance within the national learning standards would also help teachers to relate the standards to their own classroom practices and establish a common language for describing performance.

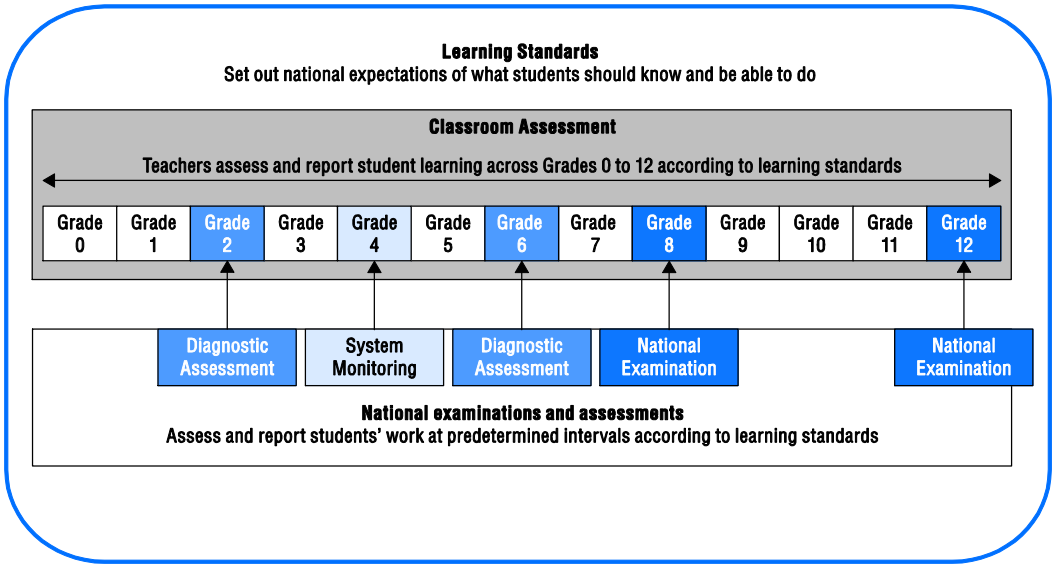
**2.1.2. Use the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to reinforce the learning standards.** The national assessments focus on the new curriculum's core competencies, potentially providing a valuable means to communicate expected standards and reliably benchmark individual student performance against them. For this to happen, however, the assessments need to be accompanied by guidance on how to interpret students' work, in line with learning standards. The reporting of results also needs to be aligned with the learning standards, so that teachers, students and parents have a clear understanding of the extent to which a student has sufficiently mastered core competencies and of any potential gaps and difficulties in learning.

**2.1.3. Clarify which part of the government will be responsible for the further development of learning standards, to ensure that this work is given sufficient priority**. Whichever agency assumes responsibility, close co-operation between IES and NCAE will be essential, as will adequate funding.

### *Issue 2.2: Mitigate the negative impact of national examinations on student learning and progression*

Romania's two national examinations, and in particular the Grade 8 examination, carry high stakes for students, teachers and schools. While high-stakes examinations are common in many countries, the absence of measures to mitigate their limitations in Romania has negative consequences for student learning, motivation and progression. In the immediate term Romania should focus on improving the quality and equity of the Grade 8 examination so that it supports the positive changes in teaching and learning set out in the new curriculum. In the longer term, it should reconsider the use of the Grade 8 examination to track students into different school programmes, as part of the development of a more comprehensive model of secondary education.

**Figure 0.3. Using the learning standards to align the assessment system in Romania**




*Recommendations*

**2.2.1. Improve the quality and fairness of the Grade 8 examination as a first priority.** The range of competencies and domains assessed should be broadened to provide a more rounded assessment of student learning and help to encourage learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Reducing the classroom-based marks that contribute to the final mark to Grades 7 and 8 will help to avoid that stakes are associated with classroom work, and focus teachers and students on learning rather than demonstrating performance, in the early years of lower secondary. The accuracy and reliability of classroom-based marks for Grades 7 and 8 should be improved through "moderation" based on teacher discussions in schools on the standard of student work and appropriate marking and an overall effort to improve teachers' assessment literacy (see Recommendation 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). As this improves, the classroom-based marks may account for a greater share of the overall Grade 8 mark.

**2.2.2. Review pathways and certification in secondary education** to ensure that all students benefit from equal education opportunities for longer and gain meaningful recognition for their achievements. This should involve a critical review of when and how students choose and are selected for different secondary school programmes, and give consideration to ending the Grade 8 examination for selection into upper secondary.

### *Issue 2.3: Develop teachers' assessment literacy*

Teachers are fundamental to ensuring that assessment supports student learning. This means that Romanian teachers' limited assessment literacy is a major barrier to improving student outcomes. Teachers in Romania need to develop their understanding of national learning expectations, so that they can plan for effective teaching, provide consistent and accurate assessments of their students' learning, and give students useful feedback on how to improve. In particular, they need support in developing their capacity to use assessment formatively and integrate it into their teaching practice. While Romania's education system has modernised significantly in recent decades, classroom assessment is still often limited to pen-and-paper summative tests, with little use of formative assessment involving timely, individualised feedback and appropriate teaching interventions. Of all educational policy interventions, formative assessment is found to have among the most significant positive impact on student achievement. Currently, Romania's teachers receive limited practical education on assessment, supports and guidance on how to use it, and the heavy weight of external examinations leaves little space for teachers to exercise, and develop confidence in, their professional judgement.

*Recommendations*

**2.3.1. Develop a national policy statement on the value of formative assessment and why it matters for education in Romania,** underpinned by a strategy to promote its use. This could be complemented by a national awareness raising campaign to help teachers and society fully appreciate its significance for learning.

**2.3.2. Ensure that teachers' initial and continuous education provides them with a stronger basis in assessment.** The new Masters of Arts in teaching is an opportunity to ensure that initial teacher education provides new teachers with a strong grounding in the theory of assessment combined with sufficient opportunities to practice assessment, particularly formative methods. In-service training on assessment should be expanded, and professional development programmes on the new curriculum should systematically include support to help teachers assess competencies and use assessment to shape teaching and student learning. Romania could consider creating "assessment advisers" to work with schools to help them use formative assessment techniques, located in Romania's new school improvement units in the CSIs (see Recommendation 4.4.4).

**2.3.3. Make greater use of the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to develop teachers' assessment skills and improve the quality of feedback.** Giving teachers' responsibility for designing the assessments will give them more space to exercise and develop confidence in their personal judgment and to give more detailed feedback to students on their performance. To enable this, teachers should be provided with central support such as a reporting template and a national item bank to ensure that they assess student learning in line with the curriculum's expectations and are able to provide useful feedback to students on how to improve. This practice could initially be trialled in Grade 2, and later extended to Grade 6 if successful. Guidance on how to develop individual learning plans on the basis of student results would help teachers to use the assessments more effectively for formative purposes. Moving the assessments to the beginning of the school year would also reinforce their formative function.

**2.3.4 Encourage schools and teachers to focus on formative assessment by increasing the value it has in teacher appraisal and school evaluation, while reducing the weight given to the results of high-stakes examinations** in line with the measures recommended below (see Recommendations 3.2.2, 3.4.3, 4.1.1 and 4.2.3).

### *Issue 2.4: Strengthen central capacity for assessment*

Romania's extensive system of national assessments and examinations is not matched by the level of human and financial resources devoted to these tasks. While the NCAE's responsibilities have increased in recent years, its funding has not grown proportionately. With its current resources, the NCAE cannot develop high-quality national assessments and examinations, and ensure their continued improvement in line with international standards. This is critical given the very high stakes that are attached to the national examinations in Romania. It is also important to ensure that the NCAE has adequate resources to help to build assessment literacy across the system.

*Recommendations*

**2.4.1. Adequately resource the NCAE.** Increase the NCAE's resources so that it can invest in psychometricians proficient in modern test design, technology for better data management, results analysis and research capacity to improve the design and quality of national examinations, and provide the support and teacher guidance to accompany the national assessments as recommended in this review (see Recommendation 2.3.3). Consideration of the Centre's resources should also be linked to a review of its role and responsibilities, to identify which activities it is well-placed to undertake and those which might be better conducted by other bodies or parts of the ministry, such as the textbook evaluation process.

**2.4.2. Ensure that the NCAE has the analytical capacity and international exposure to lead continuous improvement.** Making it an objective to conduct more extensive analysis of its examination and assessment results, and developing the capacity to do so, will be important to ensure the validity and reliability of national test items. Some form of continued involvement for the NCAE in international assessments would also help support ongoing modernisation in national assessment design.

**2.4.3. Strengthen the NCAE's voice as a centre of technical assessment expertise by creating a governing board.** This should be composed of national experts, including a representative from the IES to ensure coherence and co-ordination in student assessment policy, and an international expert or experts so that the NCAE's work is informed by international developments.

## Teacher appraisal in Romania: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers' professional development

Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance. Well-designed appraisals can help to improve teaching, which can raise student achievement. Such appraisals combine different types of assessment and draw on multiple sources of evidence to support teachers in their professional development and hold them accountable for their practice.

While Romania uses different appraisal practices, it does not use teacher appraisal as a developmental tool. Appraisal processes are summative and have high-stakes consequences for teachers' remuneration and careers. This may negatively influence teaching practices and inhibit the potential of appraisal to enhance student outcomes. Creating appraisals that are more focused on formative practices, such as professional dialogue and feedback, and grounded in classroom observation and evidence of performance rather than the demonstration of theoretical knowledge in examinations, will provide a stronger basis for improving teaching practices and, ultimately, student learning in Romania.

### *Issue 3.1: Develop common professional teaching standards*

Romania lacks professional teaching standards, which provide a national definition of what teachers should know and be able to do. As a result, each teacher appraisal process uses different evaluation criteria, and relies heavily on other assessment material like job descriptions and tests, without evaluating the full range of knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are important to good teaching. Standards would clarify the different dimensions of high-quality teaching. In Romania, they would help to orient appraisals and all teacher policies towards the competencies that are central to effective teaching and delivery of the new curriculum. In particular, they would enable the development of more well-rounded, performance-based appraisals and reduce the reliance on teacher examinations at different stages of teachers' career paths.

*Recommendations*

**3.1.1. Develop national teaching standards that define good teaching in Romania and guide appraisal criteria and processes and other aspects of teaching policy such as initial teacher education and professional development**. The teaching standards should be aligned to the strengthened learning standards that set out national goals for student learning (see Recommendation 2.1.1), so that appraisals support teachers to develop the teaching competencies that will enable achievement of the national learning goals.

**3.1.2. Establish a consultative forum that involves all relevant stakeholders to reach agreement on the development of the teaching standards.** Forum discussions could be led by a neutral facilitator and focused on agreement at a high level, and would help to encourage a debate about the types of competencies and attributes Romanian teachers should focus on developing.

**3.1.3 Consider establishing a professional self-regulatory body for teachers that is responsible for promoting and maintaining the teaching standards,** and which would help to strengthen the professional identity of the teaching workforce. Over time, as it becomes more established, this body could play a more direct role in shaping teaching policy and certification requirements.

### *Issue 3.2: Make regular teacher appraisal more developmental to support improvements to teaching*

The developmental function of regular teacher appraisals in Romania is currently underdeveloped. The methodology does not include classroom observations or timely, formative feedback, which are essential for teachers' development. In Romania, regular appraisal is also closely connected to high-stakes consequences such as salary bonuses and career progression, which puts pressure on teachers to demonstrate achievements rather than to treat appraisal as a learning opportunity. The developmental function of appraisal is also undermined by the involvement of the school board as an appraising body, given that a number of its members are external to the school and do not have educational experience; the lack of opportunities for one-to-one appraisals; and the limited role played by the principal.

*Recommendations*

**3.2.1 End the high-stakes consequences of regular appraisal that hinder its developmental function.** Regular appraisal results should not be used to determine salary

bonuses, and eligibility for career advancement should be based on a minimum threshold rather than requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals. These changes should be made as part of a broader reform to the career advancement appraisal (see recommendation 3.4.2). For those teachers who do not pursue career advancement, the regular developmental appraisal could be balanced by the externality of a periodic appraisal for recertification to provide adequate quality assurance and accountability.

**3.2.2. Ensure that regular appraisals are conducted by appraisers familiar with a teachers' classroom practice and who have the experience to be able to provide quality feedback.** Principals and school-based appraisers should conduct the regular appraisals, as they are familiar with the teachers and their classroom practice. Appraisal should be focused on classroom observations and professional dialogue to identify and address teachers' developmental needs.

**3.2.3. Connect regular appraisal to teachers' professional development.** Add professional learning plans to the regular appraisal methodology to encourage teachers to identify their learning needs in consultation with their appraisers. In these plans teachers could outline a few techniques that they might employ in order to improve student engagement and learning, and the professional learning activities that will help them to make those changes. Providing greater opportunities for informal collaborative learning within schools and through peer networks will be important to support continuous professional development.

**3.2.4. Develop a standard response for underperformance.** The current lack of a standard process to address an unsatisfactory regular appraisal result means that weaknesses in teaching may not be addressed. Romania should set out a fair, step-by-step response to underperformance, which could include the development of an improvement plan, additional appraisals and ultimately dismissal if performance does not improve.

### *Issue 3.3: Improve the probation period and initial assessment of teachers*

Appraisal at the beginning of a teacher's career acts as an important gatekeeper to the profession and also offers new teachers the feedback and guidance they need to develop in their first years on the job. However, the initial assessment of new teachers in Romania, which is based on inspection by CSI inspectors and successful completion of a written exam, the *definitivat*, does not seem to fulfil either of these functions effectively. The inspectors that are based in the CSIs are not well equipped to conduct probation inspections, which do not always result in useful, constructive feedback for teachers. The *definitivat* carries significant weight in the appraisal process but may not meaningfully assess teaching competencies such as those required by the new curriculum. The appraisal of beginning teachers is particularly critical in Romania because entry requirements for initial teacher education are low and preparation to become a teacher is minimal.

#### *Recommendations*

**3.3.1. Establish a cadre of experienced teachers to conduct the inspection of beginning teachers for full certification and focus the inspection on classroom practice.** Experienced teachers would bring significant teaching expertise and knowledge to provide new teachers with useful feedback that is essential to their early professional development. They would also bring an independence and consistency to the inspection which CSIs cannot provide, and help resolve the conflict in roles that CSI inspectors

have, by allowing the latter to focus on school support as this review recommends (see Recommendation 4.4.4).

**3.3.2. Revise the *definitivat* to assess the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum, and consider reducing its weight in the appraisal process.** The new teacher standards (see Recommendation 3.1.1) should guide the revision of the *definitivat* exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers need in the classroom. Romania might also consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the exam so that it is a better measure of teachers' competencies. In the future, Romania could reduce the weight of the exam in favour of a more authentic measure of teacher competencies, such as a performance-based inspection of new teachers in the classroom.

**3.3.3. Ensure that new teachers receive more support to develop professionally.** All new teachers should have a mentor, be closely monitored and receive regular feedback to develop their teaching competencies. The current teacher portfolio should be developed into a formative tool that includes evidence of new teachers' work with students, to be discussed with their principals and mentors and to encourage self-reflection.

**3.3.4. Improve initial teacher education so that new teachers are adequately prepared to teach.** Raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes by selecting candidates with the appropriate skills and strong motivation to teach. Ensure that programmes prepare teachers in the new learner-centred curriculum and provide them with sufficient practical preparation in instructional practice and assessment. Progressively introduce the new Masters of Arts in teaching programme, ensuring that institutions have the capacity to meet its quality requirements and that the impact on teacher preparedness is evaluated before it is made mandatory.

### *Issue 3.4: Reward and incentivise teachers' development of higher competency levels*

The teacher career path in Romania is not associated with new roles and responsibilities linked to higher-level competencies. This is a missed opportunity to use the career path strategically to motivate teachers to develop and to ensure that experienced and competent teachers share their expertise within and across schools. The merit grade assessment that rewards teachers with a salary bonus may promote competition rather than collaboration among teachers, and may disadvantage teachers who work in challenging school contexts. Although positive changes have recently been made to the assessment criteria to acknowledge teachers' work with struggling students, the process still rewards teachers for having students that achieve high marks in examinations. This risks influencing teaching practice by focusing teachers' attention on preparing students for tests and academic competitions, and high-achieving students.

#### *Recommendations*

**3.4.1. Revise the teaching career path so that teachers are motivated to develop competencies and take on new roles and responsibilities throughout their career.** The new career path should be guided by teacher standards that relate to the different stages of a teacher's career (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), with each stage associated with new responsibilities. New salary levels should also be defined to reflect the different stages and responsibilities of the career path.

**3.4.2. Revise appraisal for career advancement to focus on authentic measures of teaching practice rather than examinations and academic requirements.** Base the appraisal for career advancement on authentic measures of teacher competency, including classroom observations, and incorporate input from in-school appraisers who conduct the regular appraisal process. Use the same cadre of experienced teachers who will conduct new teachers' appraisals to conduct career advancement appraisals.

**3.4.3. Revise and consider ending the merit grade salary bonus which does not provide a fair and equitable measure of teaching.** Instead, a new teacher career path should be developed to recognise and reward teachers as they develop professionally and take on new roles and responsibilities, which offer higher remuneration. Romania should also consider instituting a general increase to teachers' salaries to attract top candidates to the profession and sufficiently remunerate teachers.

## School evaluation in Romania: From compliance to school improvement

School evaluation commonly serves two related purposes: improvement and accountability. School evaluations for improvement are generally formative and associated with self-evaluation. They can help to enhance teaching and learning by focusing attention on the structures and processes in schools that influence them, and informing the development of school goals and planning. School evaluations for accountability are generally summative and associated with external school evaluation. They aim to ensure national standards are being met, challenge schools to improve, and provide reliable information to the public – particularly parents – about the quality and characteristics of local schooling.

Countries need to balance accountability and improvement so that one does not outweigh the other. They must also ensure that external and internal school evaluations complement each other so that schools have a clear and consistent sense of what they need to do to improve and can take responsibility for their own development. In Romania, this balance has not been achieved so far. School evaluation is currently weighted more towards external accountability and compliance, rather than school development and improvement. While schools across Romania are required to do self-evaluations, they do not seem to view it as a meaningful improvement exercise and many lack the capacity to conduct it effectively. A lack of direct support to schools to follow-up on internal and external evaluation further limits the overall contribution that evaluation plays to school improvement.

### *Issue 4.1: Establish a common framework for school evaluation*

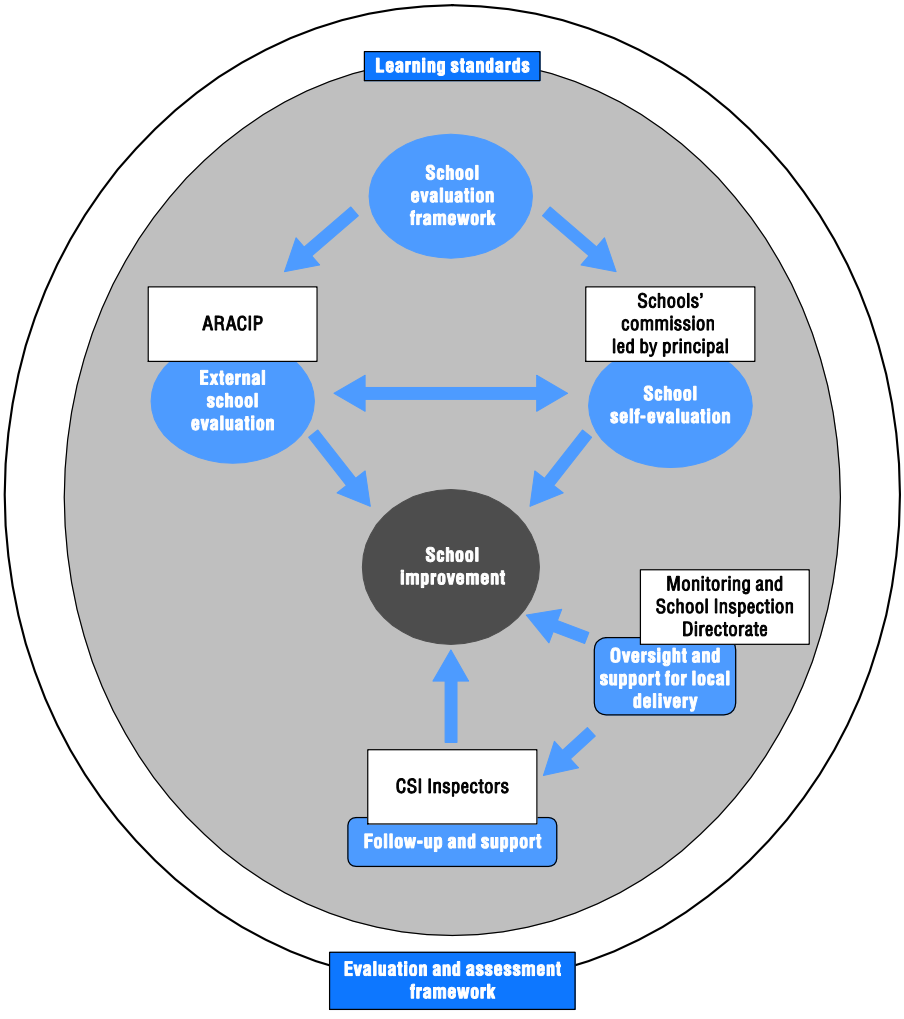
Romania has external school evaluation procedures to ensure that all schools meet certain minimum standards, which is an important quality assurance measure. However, these procedures are carried out by several different external school evaluation bodies the long-standing CSIs which represent the ministry in each county, and ARACIP, created in 2005, both of which conduct external school evaluations in all schools. At the same time, the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate evaluates a sample of schools each year. These bodies duplicate each other's efforts, creating inefficiencies in a resource-strained system. The CSIs and ARACIP also use different sets of criteria for their evaluations. These different standards puts schools in the difficult position of having to meet separate expectations rather than being able to focus on one set of standards to help guide their improvement efforts. Existing evaluation frameworks also reveal significant gaps in how they address teaching and learning, student outcomes, and school self-evaluation, undermining their effectiveness for both accountability and improvement.

*Recommendations*

**4.1.1. Develop a common definition of a "good school" to ensure that all evaluators and schools are guided by the same expectations and focus on what matters most for school improvement.** Use this definition to develop a single framework for school evaluation that addresses what is missing in the existing frameworks. The new framework should be based on a few high-quality standards and ensure that evaluation draws on multiple sources of evidence and that external evaluation reinforces self-evaluation.

**4.1.2. Revise the mandates of the external evaluation bodies to reduce duplication and ensure that each organisation performs the role it is best qualified to fill** (Figure 0.4). ARACIP should be established as the main external school evaluator, given its independence and expertise in external and internal school evaluation. The CSIs' close relationship with schools means that they are well placed to become the main providers of county-level support for school improvement. Finally, the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate should shift its mandate from direct inspection to overseeing the CSIs' work, monitoring national priorities and policies, and supporting delivery.

**Figure 0.4. School evaluation: From compliance to improvement**



### *Issue 4.2: Use evaluation results to better support school improvement*

Romania's current school evaluation system is oriented towards accountability. Both internal and external evaluations are primarily focused on completing the process of evaluation itself, with limited impact on school improvement. The developmental function of school evaluation, which is normally supported by detailed recommendations, follow-up and support for improvement planning, is currently far less developed in Romania.

*Recommendations*

**4.2.1. Ensure that schools receive sufficient feedback and follow-up support to improve.** ARACIP inspections should result in detailed feedback and actionable recommendations for schools. Romania should establish follow-up procedures so that CSIs provide schools with timely and specific support to improve on the basis of the results of ARACIP's external evaluations.

**4.2.2. Consider a differentiated approach to external school evaluation in the future**. As schools' capacity for self-evaluation develops, schools with more mature self-evaluation processes and culture may receive "lighter touch" external evaluations. Struggling schools can be supported by more in-depth external evaluations, focusing attention and support where it is most needed.

**4.2.3. Ensure that public reporting is based on a fair measure of school performance.** Make greater use of ARACIP's efficiency index for public reporting. The efficiency index takes into account the contextual factors that may influence a school's performance and compares the performance of different schools, in terms of student outcomes, with other schools operating in similar conditions with similar resources. As the index tries to account for school context, it provides a fairer measure of school performance than the ministry's school ranking based on raw student examination results.

### *Issue 4.3: Strengthen school self-evaluation*

Romania has made real efforts to establish self-evaluation in all schools. However, schools' internal evaluations are not yet viewed as a useful school improvement process and seem to be completed primarily for external reporting purposes. Given the competitive nature of education in Romania, factors like pressure on schools to perform well, blame for poor results and a limited sense of community responsibility for education are likely to discourage schools from identifying what they consider to be weaknesses. Schools also lack capacity, support and funding, and have comparatively limited autonomy, which constrains their ability to implement improvements on the basis of their self-evaluations.

*Recommendations*

**4.3.1. Raise the profile of self-evaluation within schools and integrate it into improvement activities.** Principals are central to engaging the whole school in self-evaluation and ensuring that it links to school improvement. As such, they should have a central role in the self-evaluation process by serving as the head of their school's Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation. At the same time, school self-evaluation should be integrated into schools' management cycles so that schools use the new definition of a good school to set a single set of goals for their annual management plan, and use the self-evaluation process to review progress against these goals.

**4.3.2. Develop schools' capacity for self-evaluation.** Provide training for school staff and CSIs on self-evaluation, and support networking among schools to encourage mutual capacity development.

**4.3.3. Ensure that schools have the resources and autonomy to implement improvements.** Provide schools with adequate, predictable funding so that they can plan and implement improvements. Providing targeted discretionary funds could also help to encourage schools to develop their own strategies for improvement. Consider progressively increasing schools' authority over assessment and teacher recruitment, while using evaluation to build schools' capacity to be able to use their existing autonomy over the curriculum, so that they are able to innovate and adapt teaching and learning practices to their specific needs and goals.

**4.3.4. Ensure that school self-evaluation is grounded in schools' actual work and needs.** Give schools the flexibility to adjust or add some of their own locally relevant criteria to the standard template for self-evaluation so that they can adapt the self-evaluation process to their own needs.

### *Issue 4.4: Develop the principal and school inspector roles*

Principals and inspectors are essential to the success of Romania's education system. In order for the holders of these positions to be able to contribute effectively to school improvement, Romania will need to refocus their roles on improving teaching, learning and student outcomes, and away from administration and control.

After teaching, school leadership is the most important factor open to policy influence that affects student learning. As well as challenges around low pay and a lack of relevant professional development opportunities, principals' ability to lead school improvement is also limited by systemic governance challenges in Romania. These include the large number of satellite schools, which were created as part of recent school restructuring efforts in response to demographic decline. Many principals are responsible for their own legally designated school as well as several satellite schools, which do not have their own on-site principal. At the same time, while the 2011 Education Law made the school board and principal responsible for school quality, the partial rollback of the law means that principals' accountability to the school board and CSIs is unclear.

District leaders represent a critical mediating layer between schools and the government, providing support to both. In Romania, the CSIs' close relationship with schools puts them in a potentially strong position to provide timely and targeted support. Moving CSIs towards a more supportive role will require significant changes to their structure and function within Romania's governance framework, and to the practical preparation of CSI inspectors.

#### *Recommendations*

**4.4.1. Ensure that the procedures for hiring principals and CSI inspectors are fair and transparent.** This is essential for the stability, accountability and quality of these roles. The establishment of annual contests that are regulated according to transparent criteria and standardised examinations is a valuable step towards ensuring recruitment is fair and managed with integrity. As trust and capacity for this selection process grows, Romania should progressively develop performance-based recruitment procedures that are more effective in assessing candidates' aptitude for the role.

**4.4.2. Encourage and enable principals to be more effective drivers of school improvement.** Develop standards that set out what a principal should know and be able to do, and use these standards to develop a consistent procedure for appraising principals. End the arbitrary dismissal of principals by creating a step-by-step procedure to address underperformance. Ensure that principals have opportunities to build capacity as effective pedagogical and administrative leaders through professional learning. Principals' salaries, which are low by national and international standards, should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to involving schools in hiring decisions and creating succession planning procedures to ensure that the role is filled by the best candidates.

**4.4.3. Resolve the systemic challenges of satellite schools and principals' unclear accountability.** Principals responsible for satellite schools are not adequately prepared or supported to lead improvements in this context. This should be addressed by, for example, allocating deputy principals to support school leaders' administrative workload as appropriate, reducing the number of schools for which a principal may be responsible, or making broader changes to the school network so that all schools have an equal chance to improve. Resolving the lack of clarity around school governance by clarifying who the principal is accountable to, and ensuring that school boards have sufficient capacity to effectively exercise their responsibilities will also support school improvement.

**4.4.4. Shift the CSI inspector role from control to support.** This would be facilitated by a change in the CSIs' structure, including the creation a dedicated school improvement unit within each CSI. CSI inspectors would also need to build capacity to focus more on school improvement, which could be provided through dedicated training, mentoring and networking.

## System evaluation in Romania: Using information for system improvement

System evaluation collects evidence to provide accountability information to the public on how the education system is working, and to inform policy making for educational improvement (OECD, 2013). It draws on quantitative evidence, such as national education indicators and student assessment data, as well as qualitative evidence, such as policy analysis and evaluations.

In recent decades the Romanian education system has put in place many of the constituent parts needed for system evaluation. These include improved data collection and education indicators, qualitative information on schools through evaluations, and policy analysis and evaluations. Romania lacks however, a coherent approach to draw on this information systematically to monitor the education system and its progress.

The absence of a coherent approach to using system-level data means that some gaps remain. Notably this includes accurate data on student learning outcomes and background information on students and their schools to understand how student performance is shaped by socio-economic background and other contextual factors. Such information will be particularly critical as Romania implements its new curriculum, to see how it is affecting learning in classrooms.

Using information to provide feedback is an important part of system evaluation. This needs to be improved at both the central and local levels in Romania. It would help central government, counties and schools establish a more comprehensive understanding of current performance, and use this to inform better policies, school support and teaching

practices in the classroom. Strengthening system evaluation in Romania would also provide valuable direction and support to ensure that national priorities are implemented and that their potential impact on the system is achieved.

### *Issue 5.1: Strengthen strategic planning*

Romania's 2011 Education Law brought significant changes to the education system, including introducing diagnostic national assessments, bringing the Preparatory Grade into compulsory education and decentralising some responsibilities to the school level. However, its implementation has been partial. This means that many of its positive practices have not fulfilled their potential. Romania is now considering a new national law on education, which is an important opportunity to address the gaps and inconsistencies created by the 2011 law's partial implementation. Ensuring that the new law is underpinned by a national strategy, linked to national goals and transparent progress monitoring, will help to ensure that it becomes a strategic tool that supports the Romanian education system to improve its quality and equity.

*Recommendations*

**5.1.1. Develop a long-term national strategy for education.** The current discussion around a new education law and the Presidential initiative "Educated Romania", which launched a national debate on education, create an opportunity to forge a long-term vision and strategy for education. It will be important for Romania to develop collective ownership of the new strategy, to create national support to prevent the policy reversals the 2011 law suffered. Linking the strategy and new law to wider national development objectives and engaging independent experts in their development could help to build political consensus. Finally setting a limited number of goals over the medium term would support monitoring and accountability, and provide evidence on key priorities to inform policy making.

**5.1.2. Ensure the transparency and accessibility of progress reporting.** Romania needs to develop measureable, time-specific indicators for monitoring progress towards any new national strategy's goals so that the government can be held accountable for results and has the information it needs to design effective policies and allocate resources. Indicators should be carefully developed, with the involvement of statistical and educational experts to ensure that they are methodologically sound and, where they are focused on learning, that they reflect the breadth of student learning to avoid the use of a narrow measure focused solely on academic achievement. Developing the State of Education report so that it draws on a broader range of system-monitoring information will help it to become a more authoritative source of information on the education system's performance, and better inform decision making.

**5.1.3. Clarify the role of evaluation and assessment in supporting national learning.** Romania's evaluation and assessment system has many positive practices that support student learning, but these tend to be nascent and are undermined by the weight of national examinations and evaluation for compliance. Setting out clearly in the national strategy and new law how evaluation and assessment can support Romania's learning goals would help to provide greater coherence to support its positive practices and ensure all aspects of the system are working together to support improvements in teaching and learning.

### *Issue 5.2.: Align system-monitoring to educational priorities*

Romania has made significant improvements to system-monitoring, but some critical data gaps remain. It lacks a standardised national assessment to monitor student learning according to the expectations set out in the new curriculum and contextual information on the factors that are influencing learning outcomes. Reliable data on financial resource allocation and use are also missing; the MNESR does not have accurate information on schools budgets. This undermines the country's ability to monitor the progress of its education system against national goals and direct support to where it is most needed. Improving data on the local funds that schools receive will help to establish a clearer picture of school resourcing and identify those schools with insufficient resources so that funds can be better targeted to where they are most needed.

*Recommendations*

**5.2.1. Standardise the Grade 4 national assessment and introduce background questionnaires to create a system-monitoring tool.** Romania currently lacks its own system-monitoring assessment which means that it does not have the means to reliably measure learning outcomes against national expectations or to judge the impact of policy changes on teaching and learning. Romania should standardise the marking procedures for the Grade 4 assessment so that it provides reliable system-wide data on students' learning outcomes. Introducing a background questionnaire as part of the Grade 4 assessment will help Romania to better understand the impact of contextual factors on student learning. Finally, Romania should consider moving to a sample-based assessment to help avoid any stakes becoming attached to the assessment, in a high-stakes national examination culture. Sample-based assessments also make it possible to cover a broader range of subject domains, knowledge areas and competencies.

**5.2.2. Expand the data that is collected on student outcomes and background in the Integrated Information System for Education System in Romania (SIIIR).** Alongside the new background questionnaires for Grade 4, this would also provide the basis for a better understanding of how contextual factors are shaping student learning and more effective policy responses.

**5.2.3. Improve information on school resource allocation and use**. This is important to enhance the effectiveness of resourcing policies, and in particular to develop policies to reduce the wide disparities in funding available to schools (for example through a review of the per capita funding formula and introduction of additional targeted programmes for disadvantaged schools). Romania also needs better data on school resources to support further decentralisation and greater overall investment in education, both of which this review considers will be important to improvements in outcomes.

### *Issue 5.3: Improve the use of results at central, county and school level*

Romania's education system generates vast amounts of information from students, teachers and schools through testing, inspections and evaluations but makes limited use of it. The use of results is an essential part of system evaluation, since it provides feedback to better understand current performance and helps to identify where and how improvements might be made.

*Recommendations*

**5.3.1. Invest in central government capacity for analysis of the education system.** Expand the number of staff and analytical capacity in the ministry's Public Policy Department and proceed with the creation of a research group in the ministry, as set out in the National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving. This will enhance central government's analytical capacity to use the information produced by the evaluation and assessment system for system evaluation. Ensure that the IES has sufficient independence and resources to deliver its research programme so that it can devote itself to providing research and policy evaluations that provide evidence for policy making.

**5.3.2. Improve the use of system-level information at county level to support improvement and accountability.** Set the expectation that CSIs will adopt county-specific targets linked to national targets, with regular progress reporting to central government. Develop information management systems for CSIs so that they can better understand the statistical profile (e.g. school resources, student profile, teacher profile and learning environment) of the schools within their county and how this is affecting students' learning outcomes so that CSIs can target their support to schools most in need.

**5.3.3. Provide schools with more accessible information to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning.** Provide schools with information on their statistical profile and students' learning outcomes, so that they can analyse their own data and understand how the teaching and learning environment at their school is shaping students' learning outcomes in comparison with other schools.

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# *Chapter 1*

# The Romanian education system

*Romania's education system has made major advances since 1989. Learning outcomes have improved and it has established modern institutions with technical expertise. However, educational attainment and performance continues to be strongly influenced by a student's background, and learning levels remain low for many. This reflects systemic challenges of low funding, unstable governance and early selection on the basis of high-stakes tests, putting students into different educational tracks of uneven quality. Placing student learning at the centre of Romania's evaluation and assessment processes can help to focus the system onto raising standards for all.*

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.

## Introduction

Romania is one of Europe's fastest growing economies. It has made significant progress in recent decades in consolidating its democratic processes and improving transparency across the public and private sectors. It has also made significant progress in modernising its education system and raising students' learning levels. But student outcomes indicate that many Romanian children do not achieve their potential. Many young Romanians continue to leave education early and without mastering basic competencies for life and work. The evaluation and assessment system could help to direct the education sector towards improved quality and equity, by focusing attention on those factors that contribute the most to better learning and providing information to develop more effective policies and practices.

## Key features of the education system in Romania

### *Governance*

Romania's education system is centralised, both horizontally and vertically. All key responsibilities for education strategy, policy and delivery are concentrated within the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR). Several specialised bodies provide input to the ministry, but there is no fully independent evaluation body. Locally elected authorities play very little role in the design and delivery of education policies. The MNESR directly steers and monitors the implementation of national policies at the local level through the County School Inspectorates (CSIs).

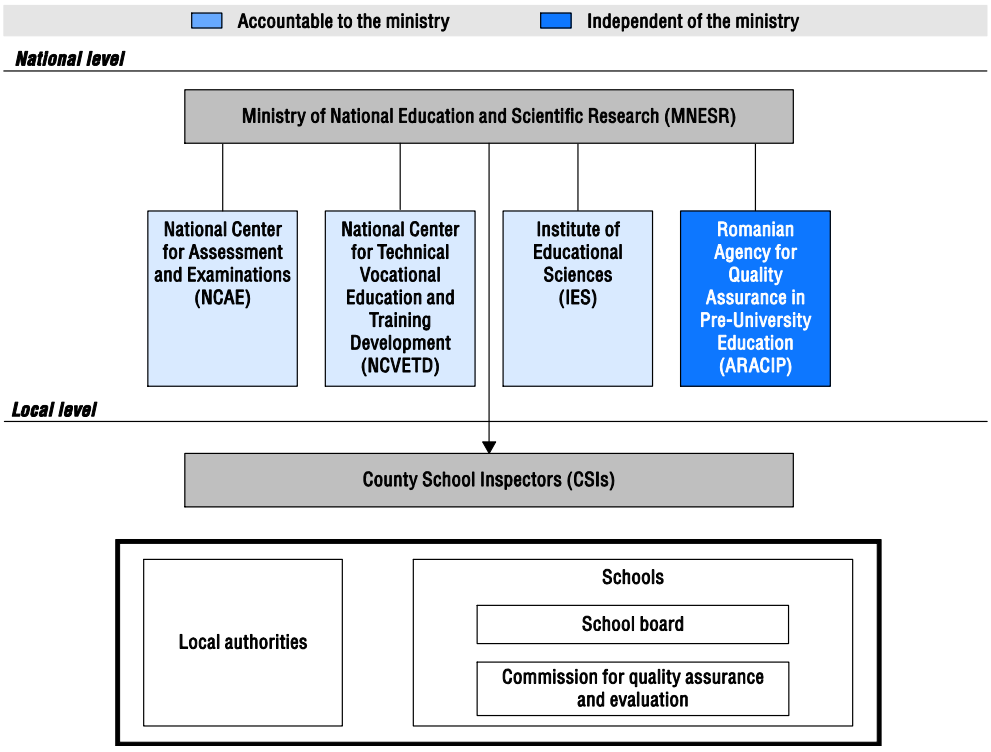
#### *Responsibility for education is concentrated in central government*

The MNESR is responsible for setting the education system's overall strategy and national policies, from pre-school and compulsory education to vocational education and training and higher education. In the pre-university system, it is responsible for approving and monitoring the implementation of the curriculum, managing the school network, and allocating financial and human resources to schools. The MNESR is also responsible for the national system of evaluation, with implementation and some policy evaluation performed by public bodies linked to the ministry.

Specialised bodies affiliated to the ministry provide technical expertise. The long-standing Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) produces educational research and analyses the performance of Romania's education system for the MNESR and the public. The IES also co-ordinates the development of Romania's new curriculum, which is currently underway. The National Centre for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE) was established in 1998 as part of a World Bank project to professionalise assessment in Romania. The NCAE designs and manages national student examinations and assessments, sets the exams for permanent teacher certification (*definitivat*) and teacher tenure (*titularizare),* and organises the school textbook evaluation process. The National Centre for Technical Vocational Education and Training Development (NCVETD) was created in 1999 and is accountable to the MNESR. It develops the qualifications and the curriculum for vocational education and training (VET) in upper and post-secondary education. Most recently, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP) was created in 2005 to ensure that all schools meet minimum quality standards and to support the development of quality assurance processes at the school level (Figure 1.1).

The creation of these bodies reflects important efforts towards modernisation. The presence of a separate examination and assessment agency, an educational research institute and an external school inspectorate supports independent analysis and the professionalisation of their respective areas. However, in Romania these bodies remain subordinate to the MNESR. All of them except ARACIP are accountable to the ministry, which sets their strategies, programmes of work and operating budgets. Even in the case of ARACIP, the government and ministry takes decisions on the organisation's structure and operating model. This limits these bodies' ability to develop professional independence.

**Figure 1.1. The education system in Romania**




*Frequent staff turnover and unstable funding limit capacity in central government*

The MNESR has had over 20 education ministers since 1989. In the absence of a strong cadre of professional civil servants, it has been difficult for the ministry to achieve coherence and consistency in policy making. Political change at the ministerial level is mirrored by frequent institutional re-organisations and personnel changes at the management level, undermining the continuity of policy making and opportunities to develop professional skills and staff expertise (European Commission, 2016). The MNESR also lacks staff with appropriate skills in general and project management (World Bank, 2010). It was also reported to the OECD review team in interviews that staff have limited technical ability to use and analyse data.

The bodies around the MNESR have tended to be subject to less organisational and personnel changes, and their staff do have relevant technical expertise. However, they are weakened by unstable funding and falling staffing levels. Staff numbers in the IES have fallen by more than two-thirds since 1990 and in ARACIP by approximately three-quarters since its creation, while the NCAE has just 23 professional testing staff and lacks

technical capacity for modern test development and analysis. These organisations have limited financial means to invest in institutional development, which would provide important expertise and help to support a more evidence-based discussion about education in Romania.

### *County School Inspectorates are central to local school governance*

The CSIs represent the MNESR at county level. Currently, there are 42 school inspectorates: 1 in each of the 41 counties of Romania and a General Inspectorate for the Municipality of Bucharest. In each county, the general school inspector and the deputy general school inspector are appointed by the MNESR. Other inspectors are hired locally among qualified teachers, in principle based on seniority and appraisal results. CSIs are responsible for ensuring that schools implement national policies, appointing school principals, providing teacher professional development in their affiliated Teacher Training Houses, and proposing enrolment quotas for their county to the ministry by education level and programme based on projections of demand (Eurydice, 2016). CSIs also play a key role in teacher appraisal and school evaluation (see Chapters 3 and 4).

While local authorities have begun to play an increasing role in the delivery of some education services, such as targeted programmes for vulnerable children, overall local authorities (villages, towns and cities) have a very small role in local education governance and policy setting. Although local authorities do make up one-third of the membership of school boards, these boards have limited capacity to effectively use their responsibilities, in part due to their lack of educational experience (see below). Local authorities distribute the financial resources received from the MNESR to schools. They may also provide complementary funding to cover investment in infrastructure and transportation and subsidies for canteens, scholarships and extracurricular activities (Eurydice, 2016).

### *Despite recent reforms to increase their autonomy, schools' decision-making authority continues to be limited*

Over the past decade, various reforms have sought to increase the autonomy of schools and the engagement of local authorities. The 2011 Education Law reinforced school boards, which previously had a limited decision-making role (OECD, 2000; MNESR, 2011). School boards are composed of school principals and their deputies; teaching and administrative staff; and representatives of the mayor, local council and parents. Under the 2011 law they acquired responsibilities previously held by CSIs, such as the recruitment of the school principal and deputy principal, and disciplinary sanctions of teaching staff. However this has not happened in practice. In part, this reflects school boards' limited capacity to take on these responsibilities – half of their members have no expertise or experience in education and they receive limited training on their role. It also reflects resistance from teachers and their unions since it would mean that some human resources decisions could no longer be negotiated nationally; reducing unions' influence (World Bank, 2011). Amendments to the 2011 Education Law subsequently transferred responsibility for human resource decisions back to the CSIs.

Schools also lack influence over other important dimensions of teaching and learning. Legally, schools in Romania have some autonomy over the curriculum and can choose up to one-third of the curriculum taught, called "optional subjects" (MNESR, 2011), but in practice, this flexibility is apparently rarely used. Data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in 2015, which assessed the skills and

knowledge of 15-year-old students and collected information on key factors influencing student outcomes, showed that principals and teachers in Romania have among the lowest levels of responsibility for the distribution of school resources and determining school-assessment policies of all countries and economies participating in PISA (OECD, 2016b).

### *Efforts to increase school autonomy have been matched by stronger school accountability*

Recent reforms aimed at increasing school autonomy have been matched by strengthening schools' accountability to central government and their local communities. Following the 2011 Education Law, school boards and principals are now publicly responsible for school quality. Accountability to local constituencies has been reinforced by creating a Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation in each school, and to the ministry and broader public by establishing an independent evaluator, ARACIP (see Chapter 4). The 2011 Education Law's introduction of national student assessments in Grades 2, 4, and 6, and the roll-out of the online Integrated Information System for Education System in Romania (SIIIR) from 2013 aimed to support accountability by improving the quality of data collected by schools (World Bank, 2011). However, schools currently make limited use of the data from the national assessments for diagnostic purposes, reflecting limitations in national support and local capacity. Despite improved data collection at the school level, gaps in contextual data on student background and school context limit analysis of what is influencing student learning across different groups.

### *The politicisation of local and school leadership roles has limited their professional development*

At local and school levels, many roles have been historically politicised. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that inspectors and school principals are often appointed mainly based on their political affiliation or connections to local officials. This raises concerns about schools' independence and integrity and the quality of leadership while increasing instability, as key school actors may change with the government.

Romania has recognised the importance of improving transparency and professionalism at the local level and in 2011 the MNESR introduced merit-based open contests to appoint school leaders and school inspectors. Implementation was initially mixed, but in autumn 2016 candidates for the principal, general inspector and deputy positions did compete in open competitions in all counties (see Chapter 4). Candidates for the principal position need to fulfil certain perquisites including being a permanent teacher with five years of seniority, having positive annual appraisal results and didactic grade qualifications signifying teaching excellence (see Chapter 3). The new competition to become a principal includes three stages: a written exam based on multiple choice questions which aims to assess both cognitive and school management skills; analysis of the candidate's curriculum vitae; and an interview. Romania also adopted the Anti-corruption Strategy in Education 2013-2015 to consolidate anti-corruption monitoring processes and raise awareness of the importance of tackling corruption in the education system.

### *The 2005 and 2011 laws provide an overarching national framework for education*

The 2011 Education Law defined the current organisation and operation of the education system. The law brought significant changes to the education system including extending the length of primary education by lowering the age of entry to compulsory education to 6 years of age instead of 7; strengthening school boards; and introducing a teacher evaluation at the end of the Preparatory Grade, and national assessments at the end of Grades 2, 4 and 6. The 2005 Quality Assurance Law created the current system for school evaluation (MNESR, 2006). It created ARACIP and a Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation in each school responsible for internal school self-evaluation and improvement (see Chapter 4).

The 2005 Quality Law and the 2011 Education Law set out the key principles governing Romanian's education system which include quality, fairness, decentralisation and the involvement of all stakeholders. However, the realisation of these principles has been mixed. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that the time and resources for discussion and communication of both laws was arguably insufficient, limiting the opportunity to develop consensus politically and across education actors. The 2011 law has been heavily amended and some of its original measures, such as increased decentralisation, were reversed.

Reflecting the incomplete achievements and implementation of the current law, in 2016 the President launched a new consultation effort, "Educated Romania", aimed at broadening discussion to include local stakeholders to reach social and political consensus on the future direction of the education system. At the same time, the government is currently discussing the development of a new law on education. These initiatives create an important opportunity to develop a long-term vision and strategy for education (see Chapter 5).

### *The European Union has an important influence on national policy*

The European Union's (EU) jobs and growth strategy for 2010-20, the EU 2020 Strategy, plays a major framing role for reforms in Romania. Romania has developed five national education strategies to help meet its EU 2020 targets. These strategies focus on subjects that are also highlighted by the 2011 Education Law and cover major challenges for Romania's education system: reducing early school leaving, improving the quality of tertiary education and VET, developing lifelong learning and investing in educational institutions' infrastructure (see Chapter 5). The strategies are linked to specific targets, include detailed plans, and are supported by extensive monitoring and co-ordination within the MNESR. However, international consultants were heavily involved in developing the strategies, their development was a requirement for the receipt of EU structural funds, and they depend on EU funds for implementation, which overall may lead to fragmented implementation, and inhibit national ownership and accountability.

## ***Financing***

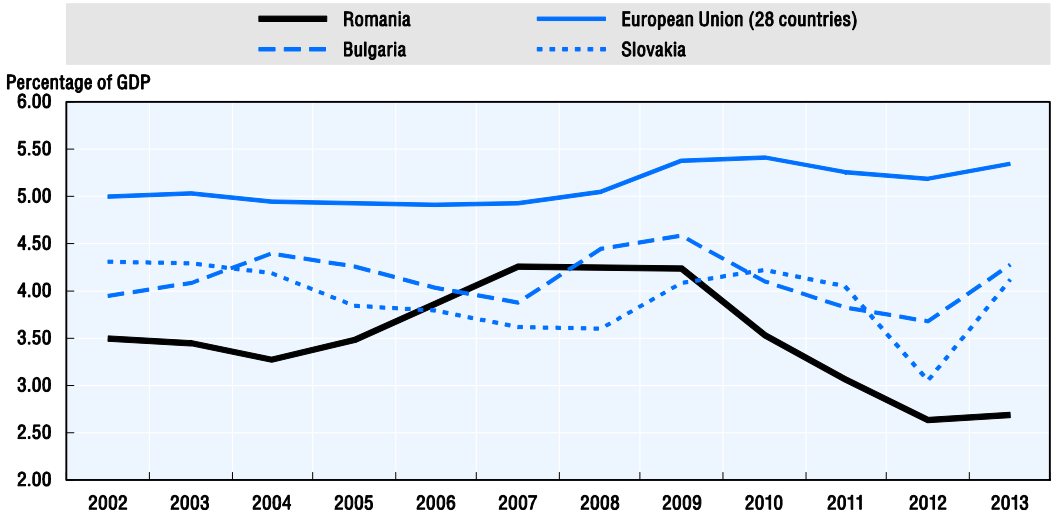
### *Public spending on education is very low*

Romania's public expenditure on primary and secondary education is the lowest of all the EU countries, both in relative and absolute terms. In 2013, Romania had the lowest level of expenditure on education as a share of total government expenditure (7%),

compared with an EU average of 11%. The average expenditure per student in Romania calculated using the Purchasing Power Standard (PPPs)[1] is EUR 1535 in primary and EUR 1897 in lower secondary, this is less than one-third of the average public spending per primary or lower secondary student in the EU[2]. Bulgaria spends 60% more per pupil in lower secondary education than Romania (Eurostat, 2016).

Public expenditure on education as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) is also the lowest among EU member countries and has fallen sharply since the 2008 financial crisis (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2. Total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (2002-13)**



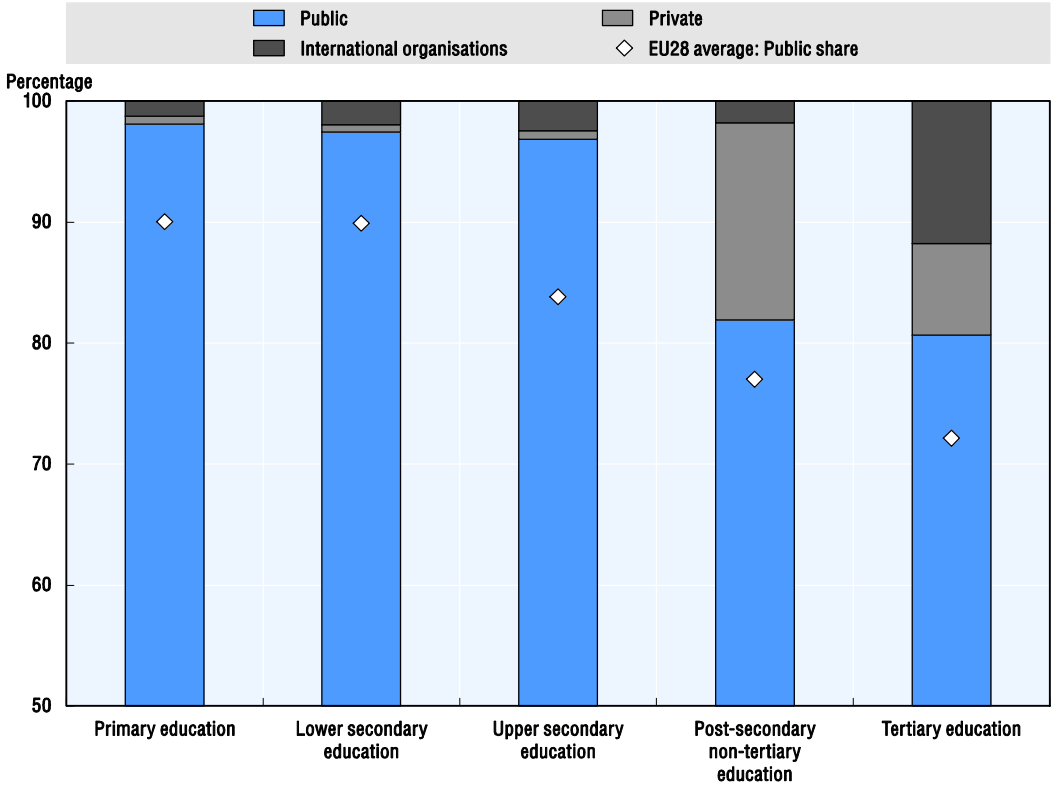

*Note:* All education levels excluding early childhood educational development. Time series break in 2012 due to change in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (2002 to 2011: ISC97 and 2012-2013: ISC2011).

*Source*: Eurostat (2016) Education and training (database), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

Most public funding comes from central government, although local governments may provide complementary resources (Eurydice, 2016). However, there are no reliable national data on the extent of local funding. In general, state funding covers the operational functioning of the education system, while any additional investments in quality must draw on external sources. External funding from international donors such as the EU and World Bank made up 5% of total expenditure on education in 2013 (Figure 1.3).

Private spending on education remains low in Romania, and is set to fall following the decision in 2015 to provide the same level of per capita funding to accredited private schools as public institutions receive. In 2013, less than 1% of total expenditure on primary and secondary education was private. However, while relatively small, household contributions can make a difference to the resources available to schools.

**Figure 1.3. Distribution of total expenditure on education by source of funding (2013)**



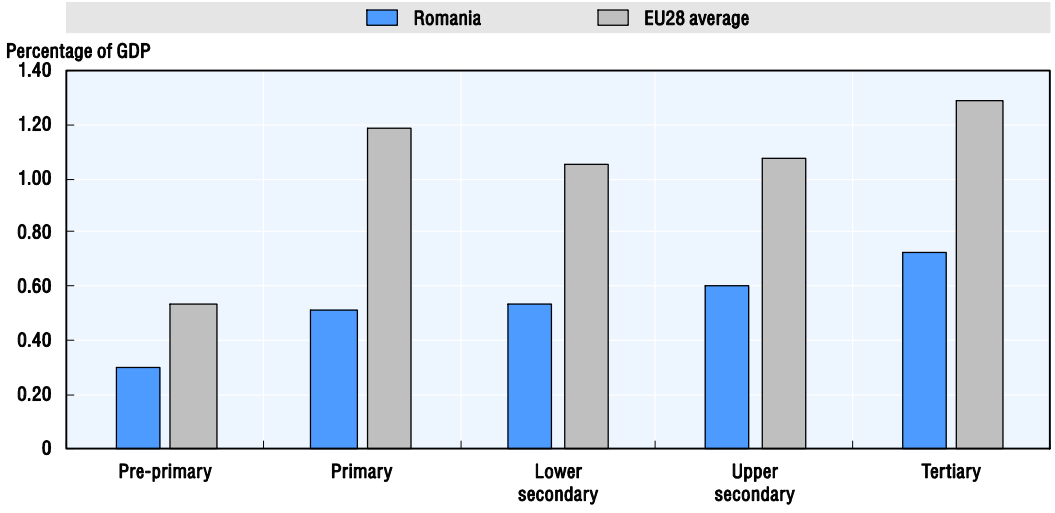

*Note*: Data for early childhood education are missing.

*Source*: Authors' calculations based on Eurostat (2016) Education and Training (database), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

## *Funding for basic education has fallen sharply in absolute and relative terms*

Romania invests relatively less at all levels of education than other European countries, and allocates more resources to upper secondary and tertiary education than compulsory education (Figure 1.4). Investment in primary and lower secondary education is essential to reduce early school leaving and raise the level of student learning in Romania to enable more students to access and complete higher education. Yet over the past decade the share of resources allocated to primary and lower secondary have decreased significantly while funding for upper secondary and tertiary education have increased. While Romania's investment in primary education as a share of GDP was on par with EU levels until 2005, it fell by more than half between 2005 and 2013 (Eurostat, 2016).

**Figure 1.4. Total public expenditure as a share of GDP by level of education (2013)**




*Source*: Eurostat (2016) Education and Training (database), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

Compulsory education has also suffered a sharp decline in capital investment. In primary education, capital expenditure as a share of total public expenditure on education dropped from 21% in 2007 to 3% in 2013, below the EU average of 6% (UNESCO-UIS, 2016). The same patterns are observed in secondary education (UNESCO-UIS, 2016). The decline in capital investment coincided with the transfer of responsibility for school infrastructure to local authorities and is symptomatic of limited resources at local level (World Bank, 2011).

### *Attempts have been made to improve the allocation of school funding to reflect school needs*

Schools in Romania receive most of their funding from central government as "basic funding" which covers their current expenditure (Eurydice, 2016). Since 2010, basic funding has been based on a standard costing per student with adjustments for the geographical location of the school, the type of school, the number of students per class and the level of education (Fartuşnic et al., 2014a). This formula replaced a historical cost-based funding and was intended to improve transparency and ensure greater predictability and equity in the allocation of resources. While schools' budgets were previously determined mainly by the number of staff on the payroll, the new financing model provides schools with a lump sum and in principle should give the school principal the ability to allocate funds depending on school need (World Bank, 2011). While the per capita funding formula is an improvement on the previous scheme, many schools report that funding remains insufficient, with significant variations in the level of school resources and how far they meet local needs.

## *The structure of Romania's school system*

**Figure 1.5. Structure of the education system in Romania**

| ISCED level | Age | Grade | Education programme in English and *Romanian* (certification when applicable) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | | | Higher Education- Doctoral studies<br>*Studii universitare de doctorat*<br>(Doctoral degree) | | |
| 7 | | | Higher Education- Master<br>*Studii universitare de master*<br>(Master's degree) | | |
| 6 | | | Higher Education- Bachelor<br>*Studii universitare de licenţă*<br>(Bachelor's degree) | | |
| 4 | | | | | Post-secondary non-tertiary education<br>*nvăţăm nt postliceal*<br>(Certificate of professional education) |
| 3 | 18 | 12 | Upper secondary general education-Theoretical high schools<br>*nvăţăm nt liceal – filiera teoretică*<br>(Baccalaureate) | Upper secondary general and vocational education-Technological and "vocational" high schools<br>nvăţăm nt liceal - filierele tehnologică şi vocaţională<br>(Certificate of professional qualification/Baccalaureate) | Vocational education<br>*nvăţăm nt profesional*<br>(Certificate of professional qualification) |
| | 17 | 11 | | | |
| | 16 | 10 | | | |
| | 15 | 9 | | | |
| 2 | 14 | 8 | Lower secondary education-<br>*nvăţăm nt gimnazial* | | |
| | 13 | 7 | | | |
| | 12 | 6 | | | |
| | 11 | 5 | | | |
| 1 | 10 | 4 | Primary education<br>*nvăţăm nt primar* | | |
| | 9 | 3 | | | |
| | 8 | 2 | | | |
| | 7 | 1 | | | |
| | 6 | Preparatory year | | | |
| 02 | 5 | | Pre-school education<br>*nvăţăm nt preşcolar* | | |
| | 4 | | | | |
| 01 | 3 | | | | |
| | 2 | | Ante pre-school education<br>*nvăţăm nt antepreşcolar* | | |
| | 1 | | | | |
| | 0 | | | | |

*Source*: UNESCO-UIS (2016), Education (database), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, http://uis.unesco.org/.

### *Compulsory education lasts 11 years*

Education in Romania is compulsory for 11 years, from the Preparatory Grade in primary school to Grade 10 of upper secondary education. Most students in these grades attend public schools, with only approximately 1% enrolled in private institutions. Participation in compulsory education remains far from universal, however, and has been decreasing in recent years (see below).

Romania has made important progress in giving children a more equal start in education. According to school principals, the integration of the Preparatory Grade into compulsory education in 2012 has helped to reduce disparities among students in terms of their preparation for school and learning before entering Grade 1 (IES, 2013). Participation in pre-primary education has also increased. The majority of children are now in early childhood education and care from the age of 3, and 80% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2014, on par with both EU (85.3% in 2013) and OECD averages (71% in 2014) (Eurostat, 2016; OECD, 2016c)

### *Selection and tracking start early*

Student selection into different education programmes starts early in Romania, at the age of 14. At the end of lower secondary education (Grade 8), Romanian students take a national examination, which assesses their performance in mathematics and Romanian language and literature. Results in this exam, their average grade at the end of each year of lower secondary and students' individual school choices determine the upper secondary school and the type of programme students will attend.

Students may be assigned to one of three types of high school: technological, theoretical and "vocational" (Figure 1.5). Technological high schools combine academic and vocational programmes, and in 2014 44.1% of 15-18 year-olds were enrolled in this option. The theoretical and vocational high schools both follow an academic programme, but the latter have a special focus on arts, sports, theology or the military. In 2014, 45.1% of 15-18 year-olds were enrolled in theoretical and vocational high schools (MNESR, 2014).

At the end of upper secondary education, students from all three types of high school must pass the baccalaureate examination if they wish to access tertiary education. The baccalaureate pass rate varies widely across the different types of high schools. In 2013, 80% of graduates from theoretical high schools and 73% of graduates from vocational high schools passed the baccalaureate, while only 38% of technological high school graduates passed the examination (MNESR, 2013).

### *Academic competition and tutoring weigh heavily on the system*

Selection in secondary education through high-stake examinations reflects an ingrained culture of academic competition in Romania. High-stakes examinations put pressure on teachers to "teach to the test", which limits students' learning opportunities and narrows the curriculum (OECD, 2013b). It also encourages teachers to focus on the top-performing students, with little incentive to address the needs of those who might be struggling to progress. The success of teachers and schools in Romania is also determined, to a large extent, by the achievements of high performers. The preparation of students for academic competitions "Olympiads" and examination results are part of the criteria used in the teacher appraisal process. Schools are ranked publicly according to raw examination results and school management may be removed for poor results in national examinations (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Another consequence of the pressure for academic success is the prevalence of private tutoring in Romania. It is difficult to obtain accurate data on the extent of private tutoring but recent surveys have found that between 17% to 50% of Romanian school students receive some form of tutoring, with annual costs representing around EUR 300 million nationally (European Commission, 2011). This accentuates inequalities by benefitting those students whose families have the means to access it.

### *Repeated policy changes have weakened vocational education and training at secondary level*

Vocational education and training in Romania has been subject to changes and reversals over the past decade, which has limited the provision of relevant, high-quality VET. Prior to 2009, Arts and Crafts Schools were the main providers of vocational secondary education. Graduates received a vocational qualification after one or two years of study, with the option of entering high school after an additional completion year. In

2006 the gross enrolment rate of upper secondary students following this VET path was 27.6% (Fartuşnic et al., 2014b).

However in 2009 the Arts and Crafts Schools were dissolved amid concerns about their quality, creating a major gap in VET provision, and limiting secondary options for students with less interest in academic study. At least some of the students who would have previously attended the Arts and Crafts Schools were absorbed by technological high schools, whose enrolment increased by almost 10 percentage points between 2010 and 202 (MNESR, 2014). However, the significant rise in students dropping out suggests that the programmes provided by many technological high schools are not meeting the needs of students with more vocational interests.

In theory, the technological high schools provide flexible pathways. Graduates can receive a Level 3 vocational qualification to enter the labour market, and take the baccalaureate examination to access higher education. However, the need to cover both vocational and academic content means that there is little space to provide either sufficient practical training to develop vocational competencies, or thorough preparation in the academic content. In practice, during the OECD review team's interviews it was indicated that they are often a second choice for students who do not obtain high enough grades to attend the other types of high schools.

Romania is now trying to revive its vocational education, to provide a genuine alternative to academic programmes and fill the gap created by the dissolution of the Arts and Crafts Schools. Since 2011, students have been able to follow a VET programme in the technological high schools, beginning in Grade 9, initially for two years and since 2013 for three years. These programmes provide specialised vocational education developed in close collaboration with the business sector to offer an alternative to high school (Fartuşnic et al., 2014b). Graduates can directly enter the labour market or post-secondary non-tertiary training. While still in its early stages, this programme is proving popular with upper secondary students, with 4% enrolled in 2014 (MNESR, 2014). The curriculum and certification for these programmes are developed by the NCVETD.

### *Selection via high-stakes examinations hampers student progression*

Romania's use of national examinations to select students passing from lower to upper secondary and upper secondary to tertiary creates successive barriers to student progression, fuelling early leaving and limiting access to tertiary education for most Romanian students. Only one-fourth of adults aged 25-34 have completed tertiary education, the second lowest rate among European countries. Tertiary attainment is unlikely to increase substantially in the coming years since the gross enrolment rate in tertiary education has plunged, from 71% in 2009 to 50% in 2014 (Eurostat, 2016; UNESCO-UIS, 2016). Access to tertiary education is particularly limited for students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas, since they tend to perform less well on the baccalaureate which is required to enter university.

Romania's recently published National Strategy for Tertiary Education in Romania 2015-2020 seeks to increase tertiary attainment. It aims to do this by establishing clearer routes from vocational and other types of upper secondary education to higher education, and developing outreach programmes to student groups currently underrepresented in tertiary education, such as students from lower socio-economic groups (Government of Romania, 2015).

## *Curriculum, teaching and assessment*

### *Romania is in the early stages of a major curriculum reform*

Romania is reforming its primary and secondary curriculum for the first time in almost two decades. Apart from some minor changes, the curriculum currently in effect in Romania has remained unchanged since 1998. This work is led by the IES, who have developed the overall framework for the new curriculum and are coordinating the development of the new curriculum for each grade and domain. The roll-out of the new curriculum started in 2012 with the Preparatory Grade. By the end of 2015 the new curriculum had been implemented up to and including Grade 4, and the lower secondary curriculum will be progressively implemented, starting with Grade 5 in the academic year 2017/18.

A major feature of the curriculum reform is a move towards a competency-based approach to learning. In 2008, this approach was introduced into the curriculum for early childhood education which Romanian policy makers and curriculum experts perceive to have been a success story in curriculum design and implementation. The curriculum framework for primary and secondary education published in December 2015 sets competency-based learning as a key principle and defines eight main categories of competencies, in line with the key competencies for lifelong learning set out in the EU Reference Framework: 1) communication in the mother tongue; 2) communication in foreign languages; 3) mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology; 4) digital competence; 5) learning to learn; 6) social and civic competencies; 7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and 8) cultural awareness and expression (OJEU, 2006). The framework sets out what students should know and be able to do at the end of each cycle in Grades 4, 10 and 12 by each competency (see Chapter 2).

However, teachers are facing difficulties in teaching the new curriculum. Its rapid roll-out, with only one year between development and implementation in classrooms, has left little space for teacher training and appropriation of the new concepts. Some school inspectors reported to the OECD review team during interviews that some Preparatory Grade to Grade 2 teachers still use the old curriculum while others have reported a limited understanding of its competency-based approach.

### *Preparation and standards for entry into the teaching profession are low*

The Teaching Staff Statute that forms part of the 2011 Education Law sets the rules for recruitment, salary levels, career progression and training as well as teachers' rights and obligations. Teachers in Romania are required to complete at least a bachelor's degree for all teaching levels, and between one to two semester modules in initial teacher education depending on the level of education that they will teach. Overall, however, the initial preparation that Romanian teachers receive offers less preparation, especially in teaching practice, than in other EU countries (see Chapter 3).

New teachers must pass a probation appraisal, which includes two CSI inspections and a written exam, the *definitivat,* to become permanent teachers. However, CSI inspectors do not receive training to reliably perform classroom inspections and provide feedback to new teachers, nor does the *definitivat* in its current form adequately assess the teaching competencies required by Romania's new curriculum (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, professional development is not as effective as it might be in supporting teachers to develop their teaching competencies. While all teachers are required to complete some continuous professional development, the offer is not always well

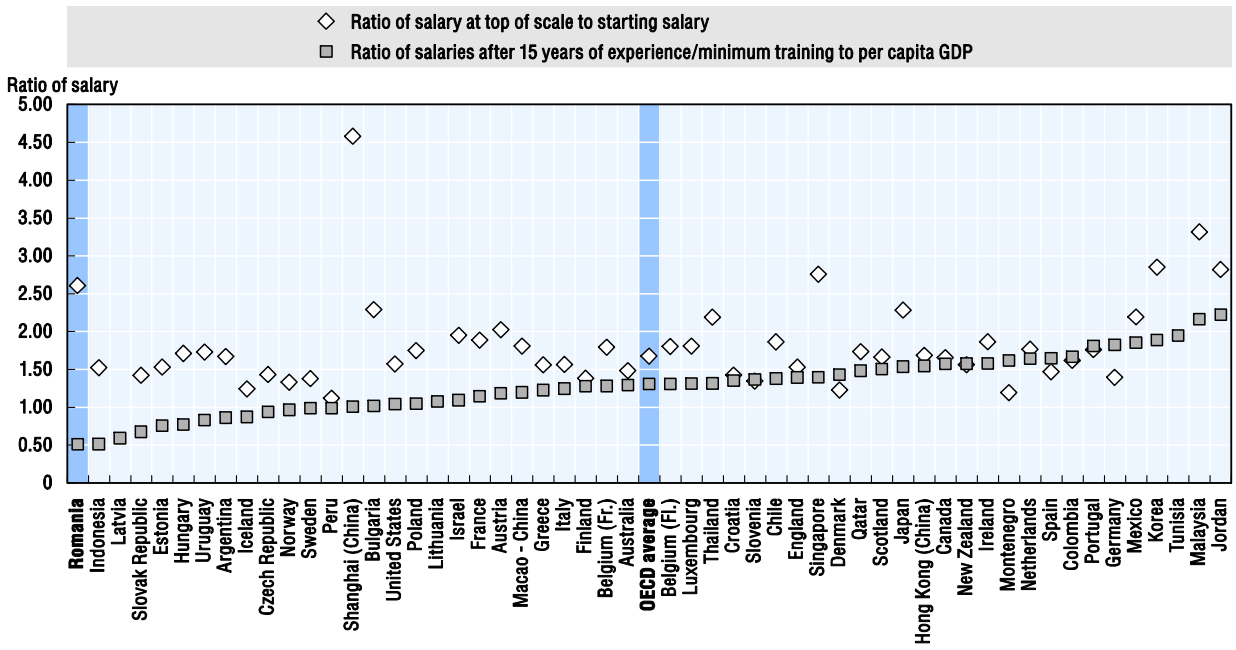
matched to teacher needs. For example, teachers have so far received little preparation in the shift in teaching and learning that will be required by the new curriculum.

### *Salaries are also very low*

The average salary of a mid-career teacher represents less than half of Romania's per capita GDP, the lowest level among countries who participated in PISA 2012 (Figure 1.6). The basic salary level is defined in the teaching statute but an additional salary bonus is granted to 16% of teachers for a five-year period following an additional inspection process, the Merit Grade Inspection.

Although a teacher's salary increases by 150% between the start and top of the scale, their earning progression was the slowest among countries participating in PISA 2012. It takes the average Romanian teacher 40 years to reach the top of the salary scale compared to an OECD average of 24 years (OECD, 2013a). While there have been efforts to increase salaries, with a 15% increase for the education sector in January 2017 (See News, 2016), teachers' salaries in Romania remain low. The salary progression structure and low salaries create a system that is ill-designed to encourage good performance, and to attract and retain talented professionals (see Chapter 3).

**Figure 1.6. Teachers' salaries, 2012**




*Source*: OECD (2013b), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en.

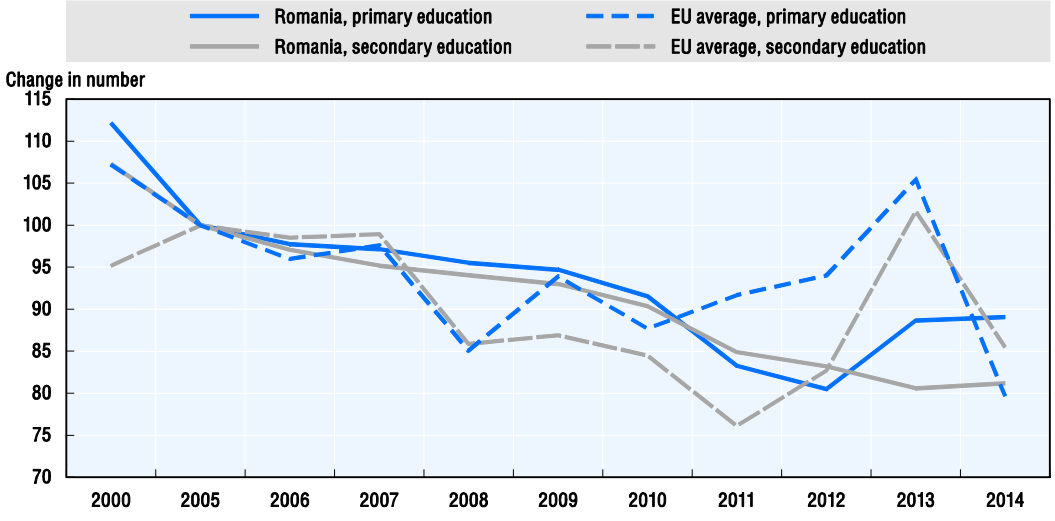
### *Most of Romania's teachers entered the profession before major modernisation reforms*

In common with trends across Europe, Romania has a female-dominated and ageing teaching profession. In 2014, about 89% of primary teachers were women. In the same year, about one-third of primary and secondary teachers were aged over 50 while only 6% of teachers in primary education were below the age of 30, and 10% and 7% in lower and

upper secondary education respectively (Eurostat, 2016). The overwhelming majority of Romanian's teachers were therefore educated and trained before the major education reforms of the 1990s, when teaching and learning focused heavily on memorisation and content knowledge (OECD, 2000). Transforming teaching approaches to foster inclusion, student engagement and more complex competencies will require much greater investment in in-service education and professional development of the established workforce.

Romania has gradually reduced its teaching workforce over the past decade (Figure 1.7) in response to a declining student population due to falling birth rates and migration. This decline has allowed the country to maintain a relatively stable student-teacher ratio, slightly above the EU 28 and OECD averages. The student-teacher ratio in primary education was 18 students per teacher in 2012, a higher rate than the EU 28 average (13) and the OECD average (14) (UNESCO-UIS, 2016). While the impact of class sizes on student learning is not unequivocal, there is evidence that smaller class sizes can benefit younger students, and especially more disadvantaged students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2016c).

**Figure 1.7. Change in number of teachers by educational level (2000-14, 2005=100)**




*Source: UNESCO-UIS (2016), Education (database), UNESCO Institute for Statistics,* http://uis.unesco.org/; authors' calculations.

## *School principals play a limited role in leading school improvement*

School principals in Romania focus primarily on administration rather than pedagogical leadership and school improvement. The lack of objective criteria to guide selection, principal appraisal and conditions for dismissal to date have created instability in the role and have not ensured that principals have the skills and capacity that school leadership requires. A positive recent development however is the open contest for principal candidates conducted in all counties in autumn 2016 with four-year contracts awarded to successful candidates, following the introduction of merit-based competitions in the 2011 Law. This should bring greater stability and transparency to the principal role.

However, the absence of principal standards to guide the recruitment, appraisal and dismissal of principals will still make it difficult to ensure that principals are selected according to, and supported to develop, the competencies that are most important for school

leadership. Moreover, principals receive no professional support in either their pre-service training or continuous professional development which targets the specific learning needs and demands of the principal position to help them to lead school improvement (see Chapter 4).

*The use of assessment to support student learning is constrained by inconsistencies between its purpose and design*

Two high-stakes examinations in Grades 8 and 12 strongly influence teaching and learning, encouraging teaching to the test across a limited range of domains and competencies. The influential role of external examinations also limits the space available for teachers to exercise and develop confidence in their own professional judgement, which is central to developing their ability to reliably assess student learning and to practise formative assessment to help students to progress.

The 2011 Education Law introduced diagnostic national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to monitor student learning of the new curriculum, and encourage more student-led learning. However limited guidance and supports for teachers on how to use the assessments has so far limited their diagnostic use and their ability to influence more differentiated teaching. The 2011 law also introduced a new system-monitoring assessment in Grade 4 which could fill a monitoring gap in Romania. However the current design and administration of the assessment is not consistent with this purpose, and its ability to provide reliable data for system-monitoring is hindered by the lack of standardised marking (see Chapters 2 and 5).

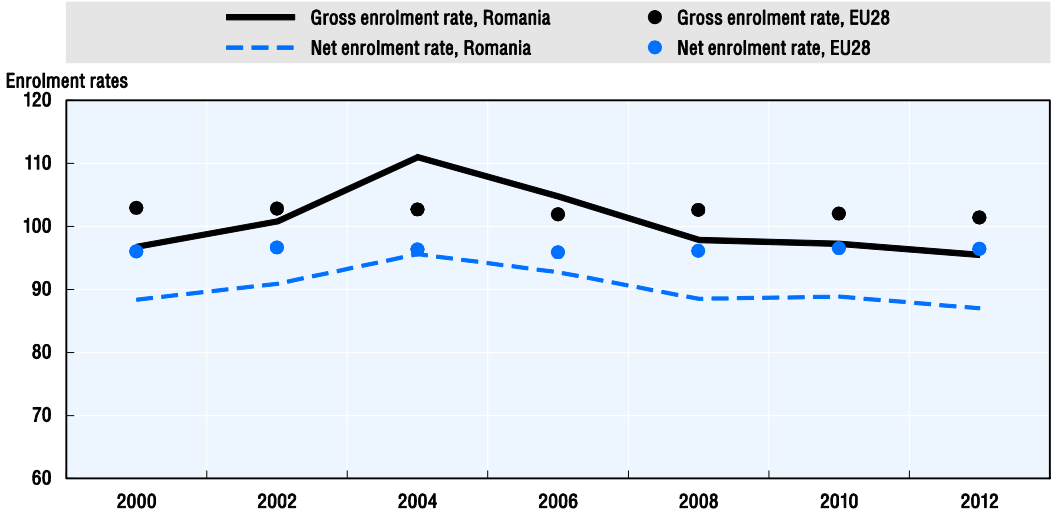
## Main trends in participation, outcomes and equity

Romania has succeeded in improving student learning outcomes over the past decade, in particular reducing low performance. However, a sizeable share of its student population still do not reach basic levels of competence and leave school before graduating from upper secondary education. Low skills and early school leaving are concentrated among students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in rural areas, demonstrating the inequities in the Romanian education systems which have consequences for the country's wider socio-economic development. Chronic underfunding of education, and the lack of effective mechanisms for the redistribution of financial resources based on need, contribute to the country's relatively poor performance in terms of access and student outcomes.

### *Participation*

While most European countries are moving towards full participation in upper secondary education, Romania has been struggling with low and decreasing enrolment rates in primary and lower secondary education since 2005 (OECD, 2016c). The large gaps between gross and net enrolment rates[3] indicate the significant number of students who drop in and out of education, even in the primary years (Figure 1.8).

**Figure 1.8. Gross and net percentage enrolment rates in primary education (2000-12)**

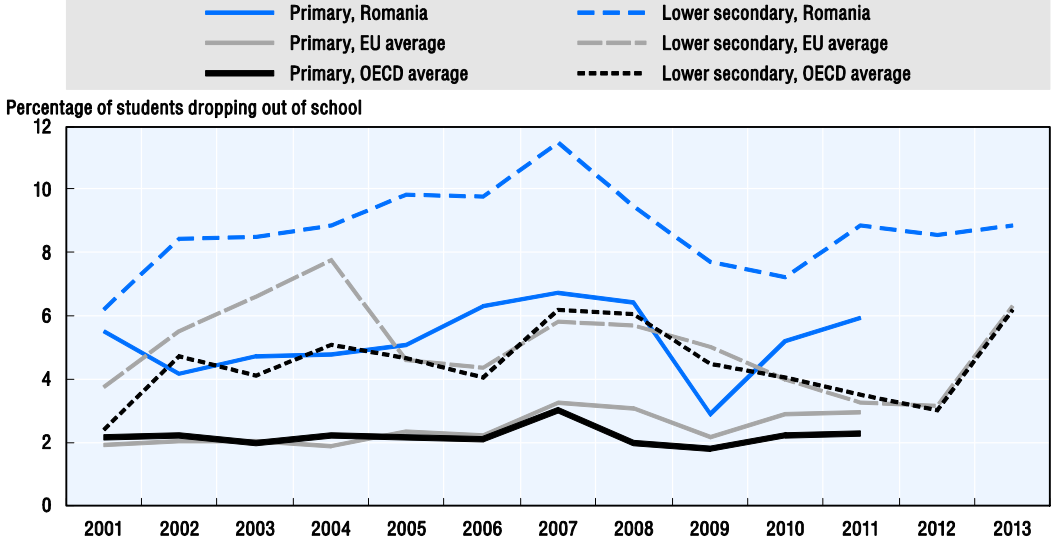



*Source*: Authors' calculations based on UNESCO-UIS (2016), Education (database), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, http://uis.unesco.org/.

## *Dropout rates are high and increasing*

Romania has among the highest dropout rates in the EU in both primary and lower secondary education. The dropout rate at both levels has increased in the past decade (Figure 1.9). In 2015, the share of early school leavers in Romania, defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks preceding the survey (Eurostat, 2016). This makes it unlikely that Romania will reach its EU 2020 goal of reducing the share of early school leavers to 11.3% by 2020.

**Figure 1.9. Dropout rates for primary and lower secondary education (2001-2013)**

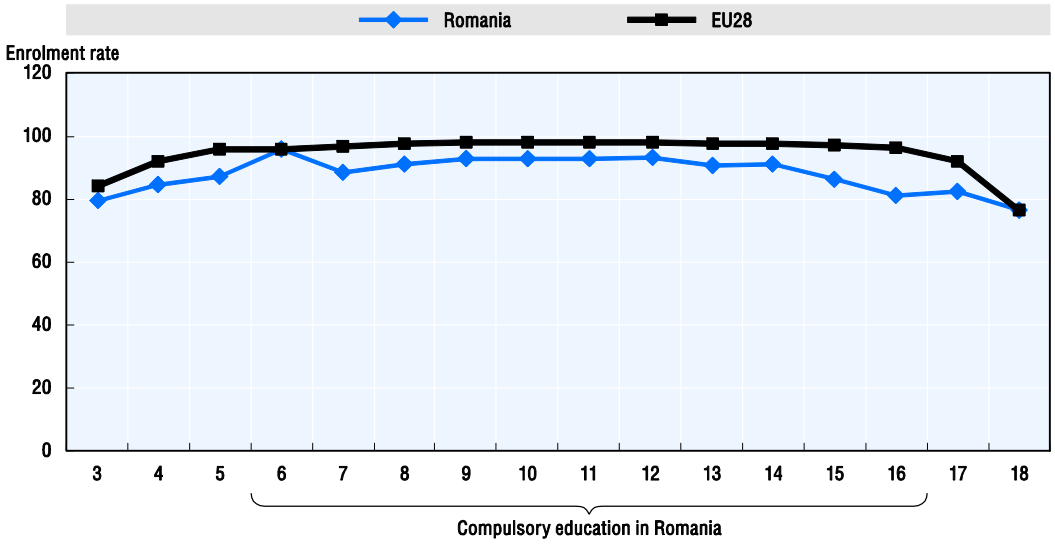



*Note:* Data for primary education are missing for 2012 and 2013.

*Source*: UNESCO-UIS (2016), Education (database), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, http://uis.unesco.org/.

Transition from lower to upper secondary education represents the main weak point in the education system. While education is compulsory until the age of 16, the enrolment rate drops by 5 percentage points between the ages of 14 and 15. About one-fifth of the student population has dropped out by the age of 16 (Figure 1.10). Selection based on ability at the end of lower secondary and the perceived poor quality and relevance of upper secondary VET education, together with limited access to tertiary education, are among the main factors behind the sudden fall in the student population at the age of 15 (Fartuşnic et al., 2014b).

**Figure 1.10. Enrolment rates by age (2014)**




*Source*: Authors' calculations based on Eurostat (2016) Education and Training (database), http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

### *High and increasing levels of early school leaving create difficulties for young people entering the workforce*

In 2015, nearly one-fifth of Romanian young adults (15-24 year-olds) were not in education, employment or training, one of the highest rates among EU countries. Among 15-34 year-olds, those who did not attain upper secondary education were more likely to be unemployed, with a 13.5% unemployment rate compared to 7% for those who attained tertiary education (Eurostat, 2016). As educational attainment and earnings are highly correlated, such disparities translate into income inequality, which in Romania is the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2016).

## ***Learning outcomes***

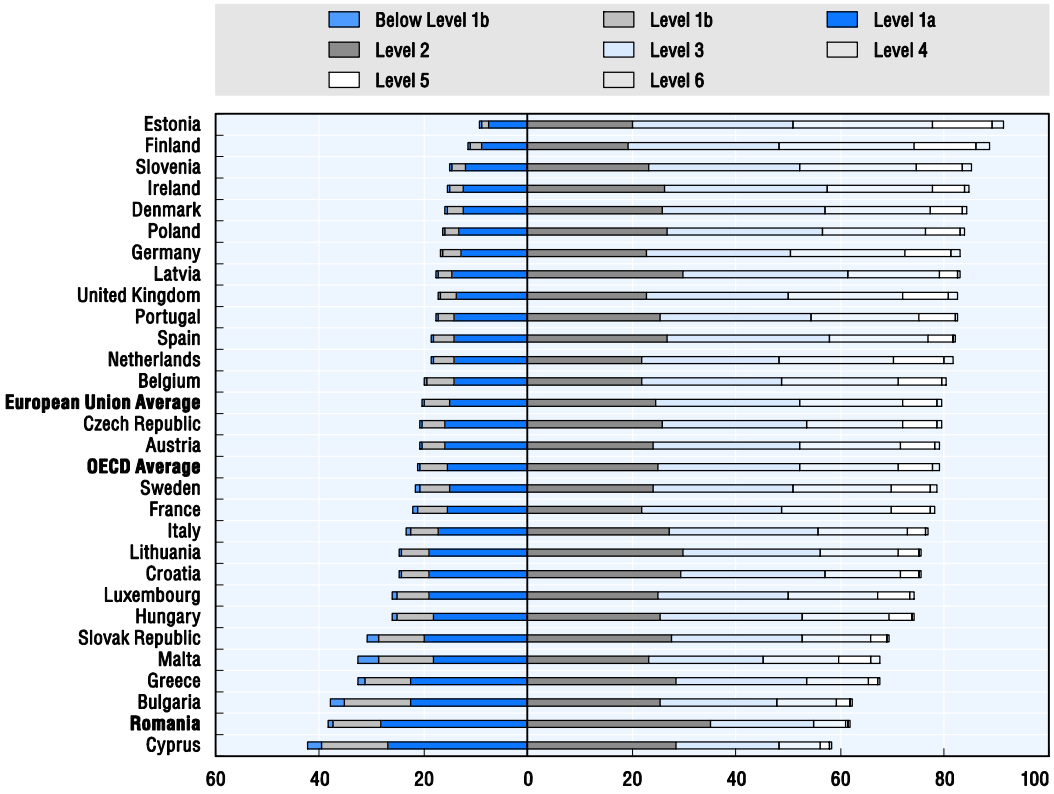
### *Although improving, learning levels remain low*

Learning outcomes are improving in Romania. Romania was one of the few countries participating in PISA to improve its average performance in science between 2006 and 2015. In all domains, Romania's average three-year trend has improved significantly across PISA cycles, with science performance improving by 6 points, mathematics by 10 points and reading by 4 points on average (OECD, 2016a).[4] Recent

Grade 12 baccalaureate results also demonstrate a similar upward trend: pass rates have improved from a low of 55.6% in 2011 to 71% in 2014 (MNESR, 2014, 2013).

Despite these important improvements, learning outcomes in Romania remain low compared to neighbouring European countries. Romanian students participating in PISA 2015 scored on average below the OECD average in all subjects and, alongside Bulgaria, had the lowest performance across all EU countries (OECD, 2016a). Romania has one of the highest shares of students (38.5%) performing below PISA Level 2 among European countries (Figure 1.11). It is worth noting that performance of 15-year-olds in PISA would be even lower if the almost 20% of students not enrolled in formal education were included (Eurostat, 2016).

**Figure 1.11. Students' proficiency in science (2015)**




*Note by Turkey*: The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

*Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union:* The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

*Source*: OECD (2016a), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en, Figure I.2.15, showing only EU countries with EU and OECD average.

### *The share of low performers is falling, but remains high*

The fall in the share of Romania's low performers in mathematics i.e. those without the basic skills considered necessary to participate fully in modern society (below Level 2 in the PISA scale), was the second highest among all PISA participating countries between 2006 and 2012. The fall in the share of low performers in science and reading was also higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2014). However, between 2012 and 2015 the share of low performers increased slightly in science and reading, and fell only slightly in mathematics (OECD 2016a).

### *Students struggle with more complex higher-order skills*

Romania's low proportion of high-achieving students compared to other EU countries suggests that current teaching and learning approaches may be ill-equipped to foster more complex, higher-order skills. In mathematics, the main domain assessed in PISA 2012, Romanian students were found to struggle more in questions where they were required to interpret, apply and evaluate mathematical outcomes, and solve problems using probabilistic reasoning (OECD, 2014). Less than one-third of Romanian students participating in PISA 2012 performed above Level 2 on such questions, compared, for example, with more than half in the Slovak Republic and 70% of students in Poland (OECD, 2014).[5]

## ***Equity***

### *Participation and learning outcomes are strongly linked to student background*

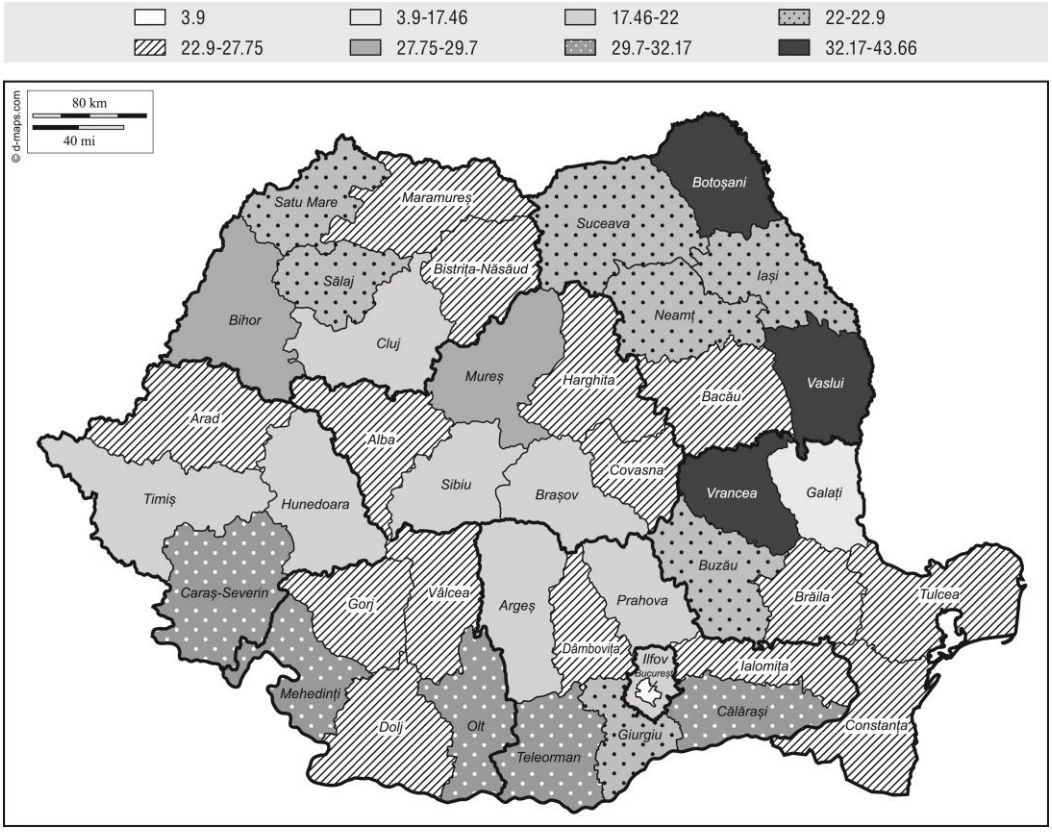
In Romania, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to leave school before finishing upper secondary education. Boys in rural areas and from poorer quintiles are most at risk of dropping out before completion. Other vulnerable populations include Roma students and students with disabilities. In 2011, only one-third of Roma 15-18 year-olds were still in school (UNICEF/UNESCO-UIS, 2012).

Only 11.3% of all Romanian students were resilient in PISA 2015, meaning that they overcame their low socio-economic background to perform in the top quarter of students. In contrast, neighbouring countries such as Slovenia and Croatia are more effective at helping students to realise their potential, with a share of "resilient" students closer to the OECD average of 29.2% (OECD, 2016a). PISA shows that education systems which select students at a young age into different types of schools and tracks tend to show lower levels of equity, as well as lower student motivation (OECD, 2012).

### *Inequity in education overlaps closely with urban/rural disparities*

With 70% of the poorest population living in rural areas, educational inequities in Romania are closely associated with disparities between rural and urban areas. The predominantly rural counties of the north east have the highest share of population at risk of poverty (Figure 1.12). Students from urban areas outperform their rural peers in both attainment levels and skills. In 2014, just 59% of rural students who sat the baccalaureate were successful compared with 76% of students living in urban areas (MNESR, 2014). In PISA 2012, students from urban areas scored 59 points higher in mathematics than students in rural schools, corresponding to an additional year and a half of learning, which is roughly half a year more than the average disparity in OECD countries (OECD, 2014).

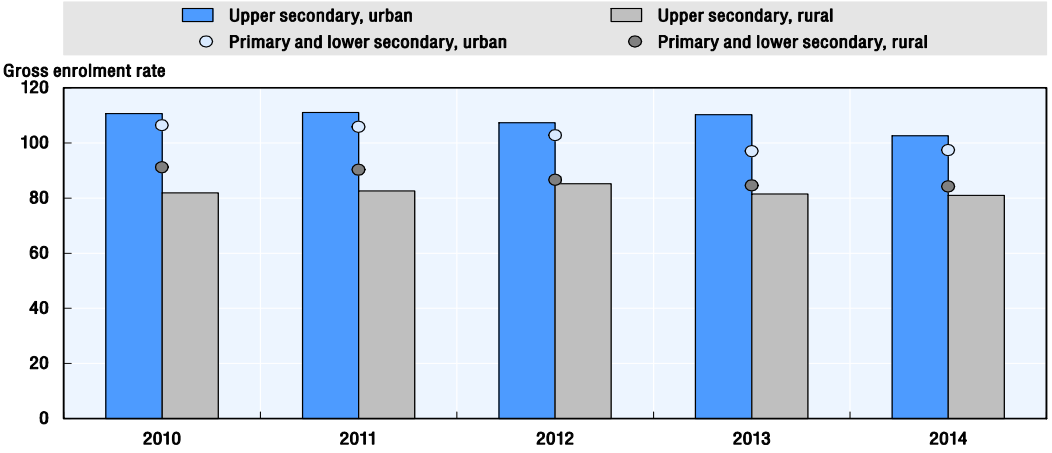
**Figure 1.12. Percentage of population at risk of poverty by county (2011)**




*Source*: World Bank (2016), *Pinpointing Poverty in Romania,* http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/294291467994713348/pdf/104013-BRI-PUBLIC-ADD-SERIES-Poverty-in-Europe-DOI-10-1596-K8686.pdf.

Lower levels of learning outcomes in rural areas are associated with higher levels of student disengagement from education and dropout rates. The enrolment rate in urban schools is higher than in rural areas at all levels of education and the gap widens in upper secondary education (Figure 1.13).

**Figure 1.13. Gross enrolment rate by education level and school location (2010-14)**




*Source*: MNESR (2015), *State of Education Report*, Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest.

### *Low central spending is an obstacle to education reform and, despite a new funding formula, inequities in school resources persist*

The 2011 Education Law set a public expenditure target for education of 6% of GDP, however this has never been reached. At its highest, public spending was just over 4% of GDP before the 2008 financial crisis, and in 2013 spending was just 2.7% of GDP (see Figure 1.2) (MNESR, 2011; Eurostat, 2016). Low central spending affects the system as a whole, but its impact on schools in disadvantaged areas is particularly pronounced. While schools in wealthier communities can receive additional resources from local government, parents and other sources, those in poor areas have less access to supplementary funds and the central government lacks the means to redress the inequities this creates.

Romania does not have any targeted programmes to channel additional resources to disadvantaged schools. Instead, the main redistributive mechanism is the per student funding formula, introduced in 2011. Though the per capita formula includes weights for a school's location, the type of school, the number of students per class and the level of education, these appear insufficient to address the needs of schools in regions with high levels of poverty, in part because the overall level of funding is so low (Fartuşnic et al, 2014a). In 2013, about half of the schools participating in a UNICEF survey of schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas reported not receiving enough funds to cover their basic needs. These were mainly rural schools (Fartuşnic et al, 2014a).

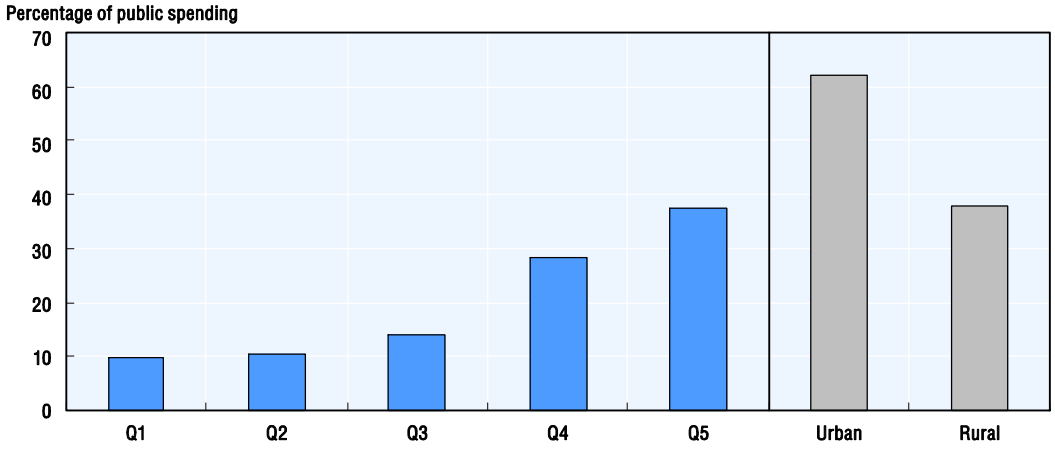
### *Differences in schools' financial capacity and access to local resources exacerbates disparities in school resources*

While the new formula provides schools with more flexibility to allocate financial resources, the UNICEF survey shows that school principals have insufficient training in financial management to help them make efficient use of their limited resources. One in four school principals participating in the survey had received at most one week of training in financial management. Schools can also apply for grants from international donors and the EU but very few do, due to limited experience in making grant applications (Fartuşnic et al., 2014a). Schools in urban areas are more likely to apply successfully for grants than schools in disadvantaged areas (World Bank, 2010).

Schools in urban centres are also more likely to receive additional funds from local authorities. Such "complementary funding" supplements central funding and is provided for investment in infrastructure, extracurricular activities, and subsidies for transport and school canteens (Eurydice, 2016). Complementary funding is discretionary, and it is not always distributed by local authorities according to school need. The OECD review team was informed than some local governments may prioritise funding for schools with good examination results or where there is a close relationship with the school principal, rather than according to transparent criteria and evidence of need.

Together, these disparities create a situation where students from the wealthiest quintiles and from urban centres receive more funding than students in the poorest quintiles and in rural areas (Figure 1.14).

**Figure 1.14. Share of public spending by wealth quintile and area of residence (2012)**




*Source*: Varly, P. et al. (2014), *Cost of Non-investment in Education in Romania*, UNICEF, Bucharest, www.unicef.org/romania/Cost.Noninvest.web.pdf.

### *Households bear additional "hidden costs" of education*

While education in public primary and secondary schools in Romania is free and schools are not allowed to solicit funds for basic costs, limited central and local funding and lack of oversight mean that parents are often solicited to contribute to such things as school infrastructure repair, school supplies and sports equipment. Many parents also pay varying levels of tutoring fees for their children (Save the Children, 2010). These "hidden costs", which are difficult to track as they are not reported in the school budget, can represent a heavy burden on the poorest households and exacerbate inequity in learning.

## Recent policy developments

Recent policies in Romania aim to address some of the challenges around persistent inequality and low levels of acquisition of basic competencies. These include Romania's national strategies developed under the Europe 2020 agenda, which target some important systemic issues facing the education sector. The National Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving plans to improve the government's institutional capacity, for example, by providing training to MNESR staff to plan, implement and monitor early school leaving programmes. It also aims to better identify and support students at risk of dropping out of education through improved central data to identify and track at risk students. The Strategy for Vocational Education and Training also represents a promising response to the low quality and relevance of upper secondary vocational programmes in Romania which limits opportunities for students who do not aspire to tertiary education to acquire meaningful qualifications.

At the same time, Romania's Anti-Poverty Package, launched in 2016, includes policies to narrow learning and attainment disparities between rural and urban areas. The initiatives focus on after-school remediation programmes, integrated services in schools and second chance programmes. It also includes additional grants to schools in disadvantaged areas and investments in improving school infrastructure. However, the OECD review team observed that the reach of these initiatives has so far been limited and some of the initiatives are yet to be implemented.

## Conclusion

While Romania is implementing several initiatives to improve participation in education, especially for at-risk populations, there is no coherent and consistent approach to raising the educational outcomes of all students. This report looks at how the creation of a coherent framework for evaluation and assessment, guided by the learning objectives of the new curriculum and embedded within a long-term vision for reform, could help to improve equity and quality across the system. The following chapters of this review look at how the different parts of the evaluation and assessment system – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation – currently support teaching and learning, and how they can be strengthened so that all students and schools have an equal chance to do well. Each chapter also considers how the different elements of evaluation and assessment interact with each other, to create synergies to effectively support student learning (Box 1.1).

**Box 1.1. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education**

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment look at how evaluation and assessment policy can be used to improve student outcomes. They assess countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices for school education, and draw on insights from international practices, to provide actionable recommendations.

The reviews focus on four key components:

- **Student assessment** monitors and provides feedback on individual student progress and certifies the achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessments as well as large-scale, external assessments and examinations.
- **Teacher appraisal** assesses the performance of teachers in providing quality learning for their students.
- **School evaluation** looks at the effectiveness of schools in providing quality education.
- **System evaluation** uses educational information to monitor and evaluate the education system against national goals.

The reviews draw on existing OECD work on evaluation and assessment, which included reviews of 14 countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices (OECD, 2013b). Each country review is based on national information, provided by the country to the OECD; background research and country visits. During the country visits a team of OECD staff and international experts meet with key actors across the education system to identify policy strengths and challenges, and discuss the challenges of evaluation and assessment with national actors. The OECD prepares a report for the country which analyses national practices and policies, and provides policy recommendations to strengthen evaluation and assessment linked to national goals and priorities.

# Annex 1.1 Key indicators

| List of key indicators | Romania | EU 28 countries* |
|---|---|---|
| **Background information** | | |
| ***Economy*** | | |
| GDP per capita (current USD), 2015, World Bank | 8 973 | 31 843 |
| GDP growth, 2015, World Bank | 3.7% | 1.9% |
| ***Society*** | | |
| Population density, inhabitant/km$^2$, 2014, Eurostat | 87 | 117 |
| Population aged 14 years or less, 2013, Eurostat | 16% | 16% |
| Total fertility rate, 2014, Eurostat | 1.52 | 1.58 |
| Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2014, Eurostat | 40% | 24% |
| ***Unemployment rate*** | | |
| Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24 years old), 2015, Eurostat | 22% | 22% |
| Total unemployment rate (aged 15-74 years old), 2015, Eurostat | 4% | 6% |
| **Education indicators** | | |
| ***System*** | | |
| Official entry age to pre-primary, 2016, UNESCO-UIS | 3 | 3 |
| Official entry age to compulsory education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 6 | 6 |
| Duration of compulsory education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 11 | 10 |
| ***Students*** | | |
| School life expectancy, estimated number of years from primary to tertiary, 2012, Eurostat | 16.9 | 17.6 |
| Participation in early childhood education from age 4 until the beginning of compulsory primary education, 2012, Eurostat | 86% | 94% |
| *Net enrolment rate* | | |
| Primary education, 2012, UNESCO-UIS | 87% | 96% |
| Lower secondary education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 85% | 91% |
| Upper secondary education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 85% | 91% |
| Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 53% | 67% |
| Percentage of students enrolled in private institutions for primary education, 2014, Eurostat | 0.66% | 12.12% |
| Percentage of students enrolled in vocational programmes in upper secondary education, 2014, Eurostat | 57% | 47% |
| *Drop out rate* | | |
| Primary education, 2011, UNESCO-UIS | 6% | 3% |
| Lower secondary education, 2013, UNESCO-UIS | 9% | 6% |

# Annex 1.1 Key indicators (continued)

| List of key indicators | Romania | EU 28 countries* |
|---|---|---|
| ***Teachers*** | | |
| *Student-teacher ratio* | | |
| Primary education, 2012, UNESCO-UIS | 18 | 13 |
| Secondary education, 2014, UNESCO-UIS | 12 | 11 |
| *Female teachers as percentage of all teachers* | | |
| Pre-primary education, 2014, Eurostat | 100% | 95% |
| Primary education, 2014, Eurostat | 89% | 85% |
| Lower secondary education, 2014, Eurostat | 70% | 68% |
| Upper secondary education, 2014, Eurostat | 69% | 60% |
| *Ratio of salaries after minimum training necessary and 15 years of experience to per capita GDP* | | |
| Lower secondary education, PISA 2012 | 0.44 | 1.18 |
| Upper secondary education, PISA 2012 | 0.44 | 1.25 |
| ***Finance*** | | |
| Total public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP, 2013, UNESCO-UIS | 2.70% | 5.34% |
| *Average public expenditure per student by education level in euros using PPS* | | |
| Primary education, 2013, Eurostat | 1 533 | 5 311 |
| Lower secondary education, 2013, Eurostat | 1 897 | 6 358 |
| Upper secondary education, 2013, Eurostat | 2 182 | 6 307 |
| Post-secondary non-tertiary education, 2013, Eurostat | 852 | 3 929 |
| Tertiary education, 2013, Eurostat | 2 886 | 7 952 |
| Expenditure on primary education as percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2012, UNESCO-UIS | 16% | 22% |
| Expenditure on secondary as percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2012, UNESCO-UIS | 36% | 39% |
| **Student performance** | | |
| Mean performance in science, PISA 2015 | 435 | 489 |
| Share of students below level 2 (basic proficiency level) in science, PISA 2015 | 39% | 23% |
| Average three-year trend in score points in science since PISA 2006, PISA 2015 | 6 | -2 |
| Average three-year trend in score points in mathematics since PISA 2006, PISA 2015 | 10 | 0 |
| Average three-year trend in score points in reading since PISA 2009, PISA 2015 | 4 | 1 |
| Percentage of variation in science performance explained by students' socio-economic background, PISA 2015 | 14% | 14% |
| Percentage of resilient students, PISA 2015 | 11% | 27% |

* Average includes EU 28 countries with available data.

# Notes

1. PPS (Purchasing Power Standard) is the technical term used by Eurostat for the common currency in which national accounts aggregates are expressed when adjusted for price level differences using PPP ( Purchasing Power Parity). Thus, PPP can be interpreted as the exchange rate of the PPS against the euro. (Eurostat, 2016).
2. Data for EU countries does not include Croatia, Denmark and Greece
3. Enrolment rates can be expressed in net enrolment rates or gross enrolment rates. The net enrolment rate refers to the percentage of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level as a percentage of the total population in that group. The gross enrolment rate refers to the general level of participation in a given level of education. Due to students repeating grades, the gross enrolment rate can be larger than 100%. The net enrolment rate is always lower than 100%.
4. Reference years for science and mathematics are 2006 and 2009 for reading. Please note that changes were made to the test design, administration, and scaling of PISA 2015. These changes add statistical uncertainty to trend comparisons that should be taken into account when comparing 2015 results to those from prior years. Please see the "Reader's Guide" and Annex A5 of the PISA 2015 Initial Report (Volume I) (OECD, 2016) for a detailed discussion of these changes.
5. 2015 data on the science subscales is only available for countries where PISA 2015 was delivered in computers; Romania did not take PISA 2015 on computers.

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# *Chapter 2*

# Student assessment in Romania: Putting learning at the centre

*This chapter looks at how Romania's assessment system measures and shapes student learning. Assessment in Romania is characterised by a strong focus on external testing, which limits the space for teachers' professional judgement and student feedback that are essential for learning. Romania can rebalance its assessment system by strengthening learning standards so that they support classroom and external assessment to be aligned with the new curriculum. It will also be critical to invest in teachers' assessment literacy, and give them room to exercise it. The high stakes attached to external examinations makes it essential to improve their quality to create a fairer basis for selection and encourage broader learning across the curriculum. Achieving these changes will require increasing the resources available for assessment and examination design and support.*

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.

## Introduction

Student assessment represents a key policy lever for improving the educational experiences of students and the quality of schooling. When an education system achieves the right balance between different types of assessment, and all assessment practices are oriented towards supporting student learning, classrooms are characterised by a positive assessment culture. Students are fully engaged with their learning and contribute to the planning and evaluation of lessons. Teachers provide differentiated learning experiences and high-quality feedback. Over time, students learn to assess their own progress and take greater control of their own learning, establishing strong foundations for lifelong learning (OECD, 2013d). In a balanced assessment system, schools, government and the public also have access to the data they need to assure them of the system's effectiveness and to point to areas for improvement. Assessment data can also show whether particular groups of students are not achieving as well as other groups, helping the system to achieve higher levels of equity.

Romania recognises the importance of assessment and in recent years has sought to develop a wider range of assessment practices as part of its efforts to improve student learning. However, it has yet to achieve the balance between summative practices (assessment of learning) and formative practices (assessment for learning) that defines a positive assessment culture. The focus on academic excellence in high-stakes examinations at pivotal moments of a student's school career creates little space for personalised feedback and individualised learning, with implications for students' outcomes and motivation to learn. Standardised national assessments are intended to help teachers identify each child's learning needs, but because teachers get little support to improve their own assessment literacy, the new assessments' value for teaching and learning has been limited. The implementation of Romania's new school curriculum, which puts student engagement in learning at its centre, represents an opportunity to rethink assessment practices in Romania so that they support higher levels of achievement and inclusion.

For this to happen, Romania will need to make some changes. Strengthening the curriculum's learning standards, and ensuring that they are used as the key reference point for national examination and assessment development and teachers' classroom practices, will provide the foundations to ensuring assessment supports the new student-centred vision for learning. Aligning assessment practice with the new curriculum will also mean reviewing Romania's high-stakes national examinations, including reconsidering the use of the Grade 8 examination for tracking students into different streams. In the immediate term, there is a pressing need to mitigate the negative impact of the Grade 8 examination on student learning and equity. In the medium term, a full review of secondary education pathways and certification could help to create a more comprehensive education system where students have equal learning opportunities and teachers have the space to focus on assessment for learning rather than external summative examinations.

Investing in capacity will be critical to achieving these changes. Initial and continuing teacher education need to focus on developing teachers' assessment literacy, including practising formative assessment. Changes in assessment practice will not happen without stronger pedagogical skills and teachers need to be given the room and support they need to develop their professional judgement and capacity to give feedback on student learning. Finally, the National Centre for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE) must be adequately resourced so that it has the specialist assessment expertise to develop high-quality, reliable

national examinations and assessments, and support the further modernisation of Romania's assessment system. While improving the student assessment system will require investment, the reward would be significantly better outcomes for all Romania's students.

## Context and main features of student assessment in Romania

### *The policy framework for student assessment*

#### *Objectives and guiding principles*

The framework for student assessment in Romania is set out in the 2011 Education Law, which states that the purpose of student evaluation is to "guide and optimise" pupil learning. According to the law, assessment should evaluate student competence, and the results should be used to provide feedback to students and generate individualised learning plans. This approach, making student learning and development the fundamental goals of assessment, is positive. It is in line with the direction of reform in most OECD countries, which are placing increased emphasis on the formative role of assessment as a means to improve teaching practice and raise learning outcomes (OECD, 2013d).

Yet there is a gap between these intentions and implementation. The law introduced a diagnostic teacher evaluation of student learning in the Preparatory Grade, and national diagnostic assessments in Grades 2 and 6 as a means to support improvements in assessment practice. To be able to effectively use diagnostic assessment to develop differentiated teaching and learning, teachers need to have a clear understanding of national learning expectations and of how to evaluate student progress towards these. However, this is a challenge in Romania. Part of the reason for the introduction of the new national assessments was the perceived inaccuracy of teachers' classroom-based assessments. The new centrally designed national assessments were intended to help teachers assess students against common standards and provide more robust measures of individual student learning. However, the lack of an accompanying strategy that supports teachers in using the assessments to inform their classroom practice and understanding of national learning expectations, means that they have had little impact on the reliability of teachers' classroom assessment practice so far.

At the same time, the national assessments were also intended to inform the development of more student-led learning, with teachers using the results to develop individual student learning plans. However, the lack of support for teachers on how to provide feedback to students and adapt their teaching approaches to learners' needs means that the assessments have not contributed to encouraging differentiated learning as well as they might. At present, in most schools they are perceived as an instrument for central reporting rather than a tool to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Moreover, the 2011 law did not reform the Grade 8 examination, which determines which upper secondary school students attend. The high stakes attached to this examination, as well as its design, pose a significant obstacle to the introduction of the more student-focused assessment practices envisaged by the law.

#### *Alignment between assessment and the curriculum*

Like many OECD and European Union (EU) countries, Romania is currently reforming its curriculum to focus on the development of competencies. This marks a significant shift from the current curriculum, which focuses on the acquisition of theoretical content knowledge, towards a broader approach to learning that seeks to

develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes, and their ability to draw on these resources in different contexts. The new curriculum is based on the EU's eight key competencies for lifelong learning that cut across different domain areas, such as learning to learn, digital competence and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (Box 2.1). The new curriculum also emphasises the importance of student-led learning.

**Box 2.1. Incorporating competence into national curricula**

In recent years, countries in the OECD and beyond have incorporated competence into their national curricula, with the aim of developing students' ability to draw on all their individual resources to respond to the demands of different, real-life contexts (OECD, 2005b). This focus on competency development is based on the belief that in the modern economy, the acquisition of knowledge is no longer sufficient. In fact, the availability of information means that some skills that have traditionally been the focus of classroom teaching, like being able to recall facts, may now be less important than the ability to interpret information, communicate effectively, think critically and creatively, and collaborate with others to solve challenges in different situations.

In recognition of this change the EU set out eight key competencies which it believes are necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in the modern knowledge economy. These are: 1) communication in the mother tongue; 2) communication in a foreign language; 3) mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology; 4) digital competence; 5) learning to learn; 6) social and civic competence; 7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and 8) cultural awareness and expression. Each of the competencies incorporates knowledge, skills and attitudes. The EU has also set out transversal skills that are relevant to all of the competencies such as critical thinking, creativity and initiative. Member states are expected to provide initial education and training systems that support the development of these competencies for the lifelong learning of their citizens.

At the same time, countries beyond the EU have also reoriented their curricula around competence. New Zealand revised its curriculum in 2007 around five competencies: 1) thinking; 2) using language, symbols and text; 3) managing self; 4) relating to others; and 5) participating and contributing. In Canada, all jurisdictions have reoriented their curricula to focus on problem solving and cognitive application of knowledge using higher-order skills. Many Australian states have also developed competency standards and frameworks, and the Australian curriculum includes a set of general capabilities that cover knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions.

Countries have taken different approaches to integrating competence into their curricula and education system. Within the EU, some countries have framed the competencies in relation to specific subjects, as in Bulgaria, Italy and Portugal, while in Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Luxembourg the competencies are framed as the development of personal qualities. Countries have also had to decide which levels of education the competencies apply to. In some countries, such as in Estonia, Finland, and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom, they cover the whole school system. In others, some of the key competencies apply to a single level of the education system like primary or lower secondary education, as in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and England in the United Kingdom.

**Box 2.1. Incorporating competence into national curricula *(continued)***

There are also differences in how countries express expectations for student learning according to the competencies. National curricula usually set out expected learning outcomes but with differing degrees of detail. Some countries have developed detailed standards for student learning that clearly specify what students should know and be able to do at different stages of the learning process.

Others have taken a more decentralised approach that leaves more freedom at the local or school level. For example, Spain's core curriculum sets out the key competencies that all learners should develop by the end of compulsory education, providing regions with the basis to develop their own more detailed curricula for each school level, cycle, year, area and subject.

*Sources*: Nusche, D. (2016), "Student assessment and its relationship with curriculum, teaching and learning in the twenty-first century" in *SAGE Handbook of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment,* SAGE Publishing; KeyCoNet (2014), *Key Competence Development in School Education in Europe: KeyCoNet's Review of the Literature: A Summary,* KeyCoNet, Brussels, http://keyconet.eun.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3a7a093c-4c8f-473c-8702-f38ed86bb730&groupId=11028.

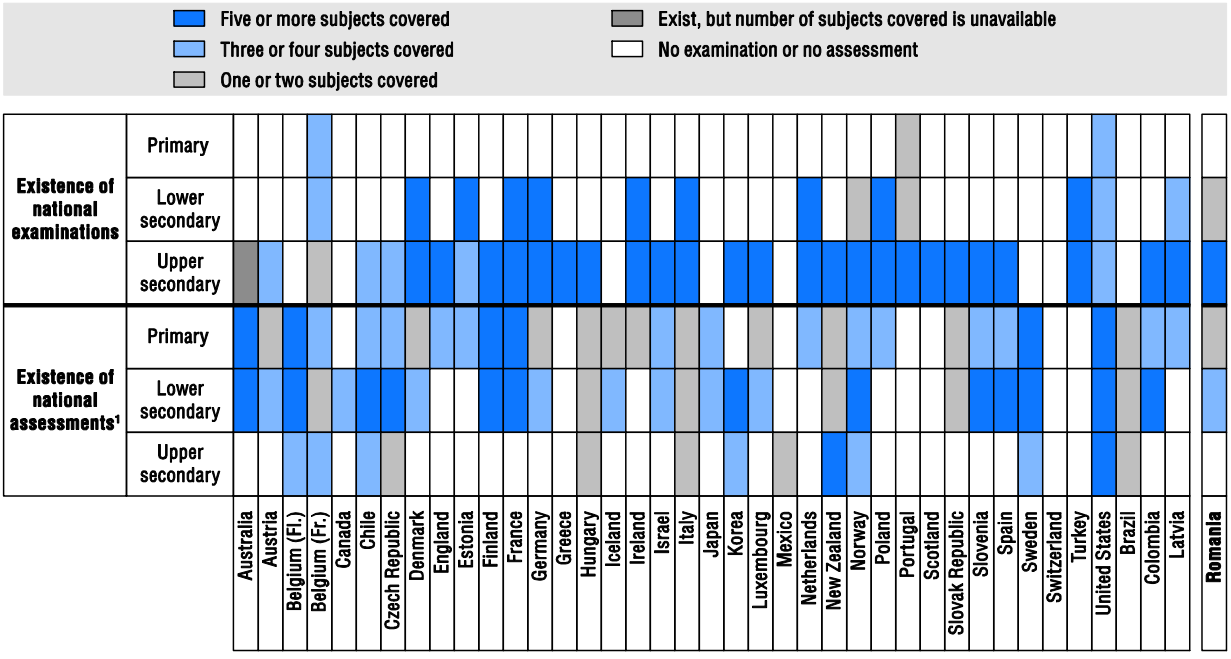
Romania's Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) has developed the framework for the new curriculum which draws on the key competencies identified by the EU Reference Framework for Lifelong Learning (OJEU, 2006). The framework sets out the outcomes expected at the end of each cycle of education (pre-school, primary, lower secondary, compulsory and upper secondary education). There are also detailed descriptors of the key competencies at elementary, functional and developed levels which are aligned to the end of Grades 4, 10 and 12. The individual curriculum for each grade is being implemented progressively. The Preparatory Grade through to Grade 4 were implemented by the end of 2015, and the lower secondary curriculum will be progressively implemented, starting with Grade 5 in the academic year 2017/18.

On paper, the focus on competence-based student-led learning in the curriculum seems well supported by the aspirations of the assessment system as set out in the 2011 Education Law. In practice, the alignment is less clear. At the Preparatory Grade, teachers seem to be relatively well informed about the expected outcomes of the curriculum and prepared on how to scaffold student learning towards these outcomes through continuous assessment and support. In other grades, however, insufficient attention has been paid to explaining to teachers the significance of a competence-based approach to assessment and providing them with relevant support. In the absence of a national training programme on the new curriculum, there have only been some county-level initiatives to address teachers' needs in teaching the new curriculum. Moreover, while the Grades 8 and 12 examinations remain unreformed and continue to assess theoretical knowledge, they are likely to limit the impact of the curriculum changes on teaching and learning in classrooms. The experience of other systems is clear; unless the assessment system changes to reflect the new curriculum, teaching practice and classroom experience will not change.

### *Practices for student assessment*

Romania uses a combination of national examinations and national assessments (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1. National examinations and national assessments in public schools**

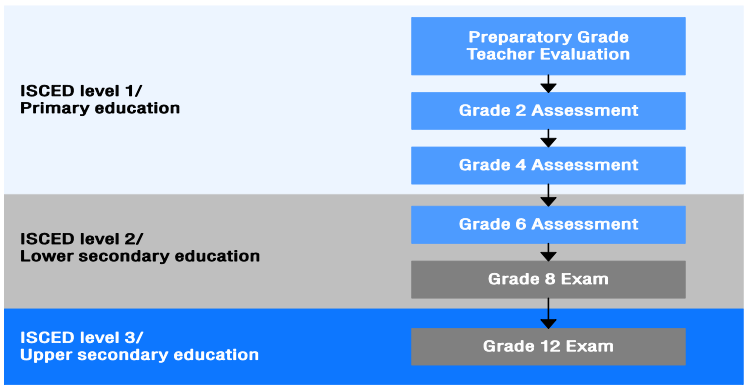



1. Number of subjects covered in the assessment framework (subjects may be tested on a rotation basis).

*Source*:Adapted from, OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en. The information for Romania was provided through official documents and information through the country visits.

Romanian students experience extensive testing. Tests include national assessments and examinations as well as classroom-based assessments and, for some cohorts, participation in international assessments (Figure 2.2). In Romania, students from a linguistic minority may also receive education in their mother tongue, in which case they are required to take a supplementary test in the language and literature of their minority language for the Grades 8 and 12 national examinations.

**Figure 2.2. National assessments and examinations in Romania**



### *National assessments*

The 2011 Education Law introduced a teacher evaluation in the Preparatory Grade and national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 for the first time. It also introduced a system-monitoring assessment in Grade 4. Before that, a system-monitoring, sample-based test was conducted in Grade 4 approximately every three years between 1995 and 2008. There are no "stakes" for the student associated with any of these assessments, and they have no bearing on passage to the next grade.

All the assessments are designed by the NCAE based on the national curriculum (Table 2.1). The NCAE also provides guidelines and reporting templates for marking, which takes place at school level. Each school provides the assessment results to the NCAE via an electronic platform. The NCAE produces a national report that describes how the items were developed and the matrix on which each exam was based. They also provide data on the number of candidates and a breakdown of the marks for each question. Performance is broken down by rural and urban areas, but not by gender or socio-economic status. The national reports are public documents and are published on line.

#### The Preparatory Grade

The Preparatory Grade was integrated into compulsory primary education in 2012. The change was designed to improve the transition to primary education amid concerns that many children started late and/or with very different levels of readiness to learn, contributing to poor engagement and high rates of dropping out. Approximately three-quarters of teachers working at this grade have been supported by continuing professional development associated with this change. A small-scale analysis of the implementation of this new stage of compulsory education reported improved engagement between teachers and parents on children's learning as a result of the change (Langa, 2015).

#### Grades 2 and 6

The assessments introduced at the end of Grades 2 and 6 are intended to support more individualised student learning, with their results contributing to the development of individual learning plans. The results of the Grade 6 examination are also supposed to help begin guiding students to an appropriate high school. However, teachers have received little support to enable them to use the results in this way. There is no national policy or guidance available on the development of the individualised learning plans, and there is little evidence that the assessment results are being used to diagnose students' learning needs.

#### Grade 4

According to the 2011 Law the Grade 4 assessment is a system-monitoring assessment at the end of primary education across a sample of students. However, the design, format and marking of the assessment are very similar to the other national assessments. Also, like the other national assessments, all students in public schools take the assessment. The decision to extend it to the full cohort was based on the desire to have student results consistently available across all grades when a national assessment is conducted. It also reflected concerns about the accuracy of teachers' classroom-based assessment.

**Table 2.1. National assessments in Romania**

| | Preparatory Grade | Grade2 | Grade4 | Grade6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Purpose** | Diagnostic | Diagnostic | System-monitoring | Diagnostic |
| **When** | Teacherscomplete assessmentreportsatthe endoftheschoolyearin May,onthebasisof continuous assessment throughouttheschool year. | Firstconductedinitscurrentformin2014/15academicyear. Assessmentattheendoftheacademicyear. | | |
| **Whois assessed** | Fullcohort | | | |
| **Whatis assessed** | Physical,social,emotional development;language and communicationskills; attitudestolearning. | Writing,readingand mathematics. | Reading comprehensionand mathematics. | Romanianlanguage andcommunication;a firstforeignlanguage; mathematicsand sciences. |
| **Formatof assessment** | Child's teacher complete thereporttemplate providedbyNCAE. | WrittentestdesignedbyNCAE. Includesmultiple -choice,closed -formatshort answerandsomeopen -endedwritingtasks. | | |
| **Marking** | Assessmentconductedby child's classroom teacher followingNCAE guidelines. Nomoderation orexternal marking. | Marked in the school by the students' classroom teacher and another teacher who is not the child's regular teacher. Markingfollowsguidelinesbasedonqualitativedescriptorssetoutincoding guidesprovidedbyNCAE. | | |
| **Grading** | No gradeisprovided. Reportindicatesifa competencyhasbeenfully developed,orisstillbeing developed. | Nogradeisprovided.Resultsindicatethequestionansweredcorrectly, partiallycorrectlyorincorrectly. | | |
| **Reporting** | Parentsreceiveacopyof the teacher's assessment report. | Parentsandstudentsreceiveatwopagereportsettingoutquestions answeredcorrectly,partiallycorrectlyandincorrectly,andashortdescriptive textontheskillsthathavebeenmasteredandthosewhichwerenotfully mastered. | | |
| **Use** | Tohelpoptimiseand individualisestudent learning,andparental engagement. Currentlynocentraluseof theresults. Anationalreportbasedon thequalitativeanalysisof thesereportsisplanned bytheNCAEfor2016/17. | Tosupportthe developmentofindividualisedlearningplansattheclassroom level. Theresultsareusedtodevelopapublicnationalreportforeachassessment annually. | | |

## *National examinations*

Romania has two high-stakes national examinations: the Grade 8 examination and the baccalaureate taken in Grade 12, which are both developed by the NCAE. Following the creation of the NCAE in 1998 there has been significant progress in improving the quality, reliability and fairness of these examinations. Prior to 2011, there were widespread reports of cheating in the national examinations. In 2011 cameras were

introduced to examination rooms for the baccalaureate to prevent cheating and in 2012 they were extended to the Grade 8 examination. Improvements in marking practices have also helped to increase the reliability of national examinations. Since 2015, scripts are marked exclusively by teachers in a different county to where the examination took place. The NCAE also provides teacher training programmes to ensure consistency in marking prior to examinations.

Despite these important improvements in the examinations, their high stakes leads to a strong focus on examination content that limits the breadth and depth of teaching and learning. Their high stakes for individual students also narrows educational pathways at an early age, creating inequities and limiting students' ability to develop their full potential.

It is notable that Romania does not have any national test, examination, or qualification at the end of compulsory education, in Grade 10. This reflects frequent changes to the structure of the education system. Prior to 1999, when compulsory education was eight years, the Grade 8 examination at the end of lower secondary also marked the end of compulsory education. However since 1999 compulsory education has been extended to 9, then 10, and later 11 years, but no leaving examination or qualification has been introduced at this stage. The positioning of Grade 9 has also been the subject of much debate and there has been discussion about moving it to lower secondary. The lack of a leaving qualification at the end of compulsory education and the placing of Grade 9 remains under discussion.

### Grade 8 examination

The Grade 8 examination is the first test Romanian students take that carries explicit stakes. While there has historically been an examination at the end of Grade 8, the examination in its current form was first introduced in 1999 to certify student learning at the end of lower secondary education to the same national standards for all students. It replaced the individual entrance exams which had previously been set by the different high schools (OECD, 2003).[1]

- **Purpose:** certifies individual student learning to access one of three broad categories of high school: theoretical, vocational and technological high schools. A student score is calculated based on the results of their Grade 8 examination, which currently contributes 75%, (and from 2017, 80%) of the student score. A student's average marks for Grades 5-8 including marks for attendance and behaviour account for the remaining 25%, (and from 2017, 20%). Along with students' individual choices, this final score is used to assign students to a high school and the type of programme that they will follow. The process of allocation is computer based.
- **Design:** a test of Romanian language and literature and mathematics. According to the 2011 Education Law, the examination was also intended to assess natural sciences, foreign language and social and civic skills but the decisions on extending assessment to these domains have been deferred pending the introduction of the new curriculum. The examination requires students to complete a range of multiple choice, closed-format short answers and some open-ended writing tasks.
- **Reporting and use:** until 2010, the NCAE produced a national report on the Grade 8 exam results. Since 2010 the Grade 8 results have been reported alongside the baccalaureate results in the State of Education report published annually by the

Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR). Data on the number of candidates, the distribution of marks, and the pass rate by county and rural/urban area are provided. The NCAE plans to produce national reports on Grade 8 results in the future.

### Grade 12 examination

The Grade 12 baccalaureate examination is now frequently the only examination that students take to enter higher education. Previously, although students needed to pass the baccalaureate to enter higher education, there was a belief that its marking was unreliable, and that the examination was unable to sufficiently distinguish between student ability levels or evaluate capacity for future learning. This led to higher education institutions organising their own separate entrance examinations. Such double testing was inefficient and created inequities in the standards that different institutions required (OECD, 2000). Today, although students must take a further entrance test in addition to the baccalaureate to enter some faculties and institutions, it is far less widespread than before.

- **Purpose:** the Grade 12 baccalaureate exam is a school graduation examination and is required to enter university.
- **Design:** all students take: an oral examination in Romanian; a test in a modern foreign language with the results aligned to the European Framework of Reference for Languages; an assessment in computer skills to access the European Computer Driving Licence in digital competencies; and a written test in the Romanian language and literature. Students then take different options according to the course of study. For example, students in theoretical high schools following a science programme take an examination in mathematics and an examination in sciences while those following a humanities programme take an examination in history and an examination in either geography or another social sciences or humanities subject based on their own choice. Students in vocational and technological high schools also take an examination(s) focused on their areas of specialisation.

  The original 2011 law aimed to introduce more trans-disciplinary examinations but implementation has been postponed, in anticipation of the revision of the Grade 12 examination when the new curriculum is implemented.
- **Reporting and use:** students must pass the baccalaureate to enter tertiary education. While students in all high schools can take the baccalaureate, there is significant variation in the pass rate. In 2013, 80% of graduates from theoretical high schools and 73% of graduates from "vocational" high schools passed the examination, but only 38% of technology high school graduates did so. There is also significant variation in pass rates across counties and between urban and rural areas. In 2014, 59% of students in rural high schools who sat the baccalaureate were successful compared with 76% of students living in urban areas (MNESR, 2014b)

  As with the Grade 8 results, the Grade 12 results are reported in the State of Education report. Data on the number of candidates, distribution of marks, results by county, urban/rural area, type of high school and gender are provided. No breakdown of results by socio-economic status is provided.

### *Classroom assessment*

In Romanian schools there is a well-established practice of evaluating student progress in all subjects, and recording results in a record or index that informs students' final grade for the year. These results determine student progression to the next grade, although in practice very few students repeat a grade. In lower secondary education they also influence the high school a student attends by contributing to a student's final mark for Grade 8.

In the first four years of schooling, students' work, homework or class tests are scored on a four-point scale (very good, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory). At the end of the semester or grade, these marks are used to calculate the semester or grade average mark. Such assessments are known as "qualifiers" – they are given status in relation to the end of semester mark. This orientation of scoring towards the final semester mark is noteworthy. It means that assessment is always focused on the next task or test (how to do better in the next task, even though the next task will be different) rather than on looking at work done and seeing how it could have been better. While this assessment practice is often referred to in Romania as formative assessment, there is little emphasis on feedback to students on their own learning, a key feature of formative assessment as generally understood (see Policy Issue 2.3).

In secondary education, scoring is on a ten-point numeric scale, with ten being the highest mark. Five is the passing mark. As in the earlier stages of schooling, marks awarded across the semester are used to generate an end of semester average, but from Grades 5-8 there is also an important yearly average grade. A student's yearly average mark from Grades 5-8 make up 25% (and from 2017, 20%) of the total mark for Grade 8 that is used, together with student choice and the Grade 8 examination results, for selection to high school. This means that at least some of the high stakes associated with the Grade 8 examination also influence classroom assessment throughout lower secondary education.

In the past, results from national examinations have revealed a significant gap between teacher assessments and the actual knowledge and skills of students, with teachers' classroom assessment marks seemingly inflated in relation to students' national examination results. In response to this, the 2011 Education Law sought to improve the reliability of classroom assessments and teachers' assessment practices, by providing an external measure of student learning through the new national assessments.

## ***Use of results***

### *Tracking into different schools*

The results of the Grade 8 exam are used to direct students to different upper secondary pathways, or "track" them, as this process is known. These pathways in Romania are particularly diverse, and include theoretical high schools and "vocational" schools (actually academic schools with a focus on arts, sports, theology or the military) that attract students who aspire to university. Another separate option is the technological high schools. The majority of students enrol in theoretical and technological schools. While technological schools are classified as "vocational" in reality they comprise a wide variety of different school types, most of which offer few of the features associated with high-quality vocational education and training (VET), such as opportunities for work-based learning. Improving the quality of training available in these schools is a national policy priority (see Chapter 1). However, at present the technological pathway effectively

constitutes a second-class option and sees much higher levels of dropout rates than other upper secondary schools (Fartuşnic et al., 2014).

Such tracking of students into different educational paths occurs comparatively early in Romania, at the age of 14. In contrast the median age for tracking in OECD countries is 15 years, and the current trend is to try to keep to all students in comprehensive education for as long as possible. Tracking can have a negative impact on student achievement overall, since those students assigned to lower tracks tend to have poorer outcomes, and on equity, since more disadvantaged students tend to be assigned to lower tracks (OECD, 2012). The variability in student completion rates of upper secondary and baccalaureate pass rates across the different kinds of high schools suggests that these negative consequences also occur in Romania (see Policy Issue 2.2).

### *Year repetition*

While there is an explicit policy which does not allow repetition in either the Preparatory Grade or Grade 1, from Grade 2 upwards students are required to achieve a final average grade of "sufficient" in their subjects. They can be required to repeat the year if they have less than "sufficient" in more than two subjects (MNESR, 2016). Students in this situation have the option of taking a second examination during the summer; if they successfully pass this, they do not have to repeat the grade (Eurydice, 2016).

In practice, repetition is relatively rare in Romanian schools by international standards, with just 4.5% of students across all levels of education repeating a grade at least once, in contrast to the OECD average of 12.4% (OECD, 2013b). Repetition is more frequent in the first years following the transition to lower secondary and upper secondary. It is higher among students in rural areas (Fartuşnic et al., 2014).

### *Teacher appraisal and school evaluation*

Students' end-of-year marks and the results obtained in national examinations carry significant stakes for teachers and schools. The results of national examinations are used in the evaluation of teachers for the merit award which carries a salary increase of 25% (see Chapter 3). While student assessment is just one criterion in the evaluation process, it nonetheless carries significant weight. In the school evaluations conducted by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), and the County School Inspectorates (CSIs), learning outcomes, as represented in assessment and examination scores, are included in the evaluation framework. The MNESR also ranks high schools nationally according to students' entrance scores in the Grade 8 national examination. A more sophisticated ranking has been developed by ARACIP, which takes school context into account. However, ARACIP's alternative "efficiency" school index is not systematically used in school evaluations or by schools themselves (see Chapter 4).

Romania uses assessment results to appraise the effectiveness of teachers and compare schools with others more than the OECD average (Table 2.2). While accountability information, such as the use of school exam results to publicly monitor performance, is important, the other purposes of assessment, such as improvement and development, can be lost if accountability becomes the focus of assessment policy and of public attention (Pellegrino, 2014). It may also undermine teachers' assessments' formative role, and encourage practices that have negative consequences for student

learning like allocating greater resources to the subjects that are tested or focusing teaching on students more likely to improve results (OECD, 2013c).

**Table 2.2. Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported the assessments of students in the modal grade for 15-year-olds are used for the following purposes**

| | Toinform parents about their child's progress | Tomonitorthe school's progress fromyear toyea r | Tomake judgements about teachers' effectiveness | Tocompare theschool withother schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Teacher-developedtests** | | | | |
| **OECDa verage** | 92 | 56 | 39 | 17 |
| **Romania** | 97 | 86 | 61 | 52 |
| **Standardisedtests** | | | | |
| **OECDa verage** | 62 | 69 | 37 | 60 |
| **Romania** | 88 | 85 | 72 | 75 |

*Source*: OECD (2016a), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en.

## *Capacity for student assessment*

### *Teachers' assessment knowledge and skills*

Romanian teachers have limited experience of assessment beyond external assessments and examinations. Initial teacher education does include a course on assessment and evaluation, but teachers have little opportunity to develop their technical capacity in assessment and to practise formative assessment skills (see Chapter 3). They also have limited access to relevant continuing professional development. This means that most teachers learn their assessment practice from their peers in school, and from the requirements of administering external assessments and examinations. Teachers in Romania know how to follow the procedures required to use a marking scheme, aggregate scores, record marks over time, generate a portfolio of scores and report on results. They pride themselves on being able to do this work well, and they see it as an important part of their professional role. But this form of "assessment literacy" is restricted; it focuses solely on summative assessment and on the more technical work of test administration.

### *The roles and capacity of key institutions*

Along with the MNESR, two institutions play a key role in assessments – the NCAE and the IES. Each of these institutions provides important expertise in educational assessment and evaluation, contributing to the overall professionalisation of assessment and analysis in Romania. While the IES and NCAE are both separate institutions from the MNESR, they remain accountable to the Ministry. Their programme of work is determined with the Ministry and they receive all or the majority of their operational budgets from the Ministry (although on occasion the IES has received funding from in relation to EU programmes or projects). In recent years, increases in the organisations' workload without proportional increases in their budget and resources has reduced their ability to develop organisationally, and in some cases has created significant gaps, especially around modern test development techniques (see Policy Issue 2.4).

### The National Centre for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE)

The NCAE was created in 1998 as an executive agency of the MNESR to improve the quality of assessment in Romania. It designs the national assessments and examinations, oversees their marking, and collates and analyses the results. It produces reports on national performance in examinations and assessments, although these are somewhat limited and contain little contextual data that would be useful for policy making and system planning. It also develops the two major written tests for teachers, the *definitivat*, for new teachers, and the *titularizare*, the tenure exam (see Chapter 3). Unusually for a specialist assessment centre, it is also responsible for the evaluation of textbooks. While the NCAE has historically been responsible for Romania's participation in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), from 2018 the latter will be managed by the IES, meaning that the centre is no longer engaged in any international large-scale student assessments and the learning opportunities these provide.

Over time, the NCAE has increasingly taken on more tasks, such as the design, administration and analysis of the new national assessments, teachers' written exams and textbook evaluation without any increase in resources. This means that it lacks the resources to modernise the national assessment system, or to provide more fine-grained analyses of student performance. The centre has a staffing allocation of 42 posts (of which 38 were filled at the time of reporting), with only 24 staff responsible for testing across 6 national examinations and assessments. It has significant technology gaps in its data management and analysis, and test development.

### Institute of Educational Sciences (IES)

The IES provides research to support and evaluate policy and to support innovation in the education system. Its mission statement makes particular reference to promoting authentic, motivating, active and creative learning for students. Along with the MNESR, it produces system-level analysis.

The IES now leads Romania's participation in PISA and previously led Romania's participation in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) until 2011, when participation was suspended due to a lack of resources. Recently it has also been asked to analyse the results of the practice or "mock" exam provided for the Grade 8 examination. This analysis, unlike data generated by the NCAE, contained some contextual information on performance.

The IES has a key role in the development of Romania's new curriculum, setting the framework for all school programmes and co-ordinating the development of the subject curricula. IES produces teacher guides on how to implement the new curriculum and has published a range of supporting materials online. It is also developing, in co-operation with the Ministry and NCAE a pilot to assess student acquisition of the eight key competencies, according to the expectations set out for the end of the primary cycle in the curriculum framework.

## Policy issues

Romania has an assessment system which strives towards excellence. This focus on student achievement is positive and motivates many students and teachers to try to do as well as they can. Student achievement is recognised through national examinations of

increasing quality and reliability. However, achievement is narrowly focused on academic performance and does not recognise a broad range of student capabilities, or the complex competencies that are required in a modern economy. High-stakes examinations act as gatekeepers that successively select students to different educational tracks of uneven quality, while the lack of mitigating policies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds exacerbates the inequities that these examinations create. The current dominance of national testing in the assessment system also crowds out the space to develop teachers' assessment literacy, thereby limiting one of the most important means of improving students' learning outcomes.

Reviewing and revising some parts of the assessment system would help Romania to develop a better quality, fairer and more supportive system that encourages broader student learning. This will need to be accompanied by investment in central capacity to deliver assessments and examinations, and the accompanying guidance, and above all, in teachers' abilities to use assessment to support student learning.

## Policy Issue 2.1: Aligning student assessment with the learning goals of the new curriculum

Many EU and OECD countries have incorporated competence into their national curricula. However, this is not sufficient on its own to lead to changes in teaching and learning. The assessment system also needs to be aligned with the new curriculum (Pepper, 2011). This is essential not just because a valid assessment system must assess what students are expected to learn but also because it shapes teaching and learning (OECD, 2013d). When assessment practices are not aligned with the curriculum it risks undermining it, since teachers and students want to perform well in assessments, and so teach and learn to match the assessment system rather than the curriculum.

Romania has yet to align its student assessment with the competencies of its new curriculum. While the new national assessments in primary and lower secondary have started to assess core competencies, classroom-based assessment and the national examinations remain focused on traditional subject-based assessments of the knowledge and skills acquired. This creates a significant impediment to achieving the changes the new curriculum aspires to.

This policy issue explores how Romania can promote closer alignment between its practices for assessment and the learning expectations of its new curriculum. In particular it focuses on how learning standards can be strengthened as the central reference point for assessment. It also suggests how better use can also be made of Grade 2 and 6 national assessments, by providing teacher guidance, to develop teachers' understanding of the national learning standards. It is clear that closer alignment will require efforts to develop teachers' assessment literacy (see Policy Issue 2.3). In addition, reforms to national examinations are necessary, as the curriculum, and Grade 8 and Grade 12 examinations currently set very different expectations for learning, creating unclear goalposts for teachers and students (see Policy Issue 2.2).

### *Adopting a standards-based approach*

Romania is by no means alone in finding it difficult to align its assessment system with the learning goals of a competence-based curriculum. In many OECD countries, the frameworks for national assessment are not fully aligned with the curriculum's ambition

to develop competence. The consequence is that central and teacher-based assessments continue to typically focus on the assessment of a narrow range of skills (Nusche, 2016). Many OECD and EU countries have responded to this challenge by developing national learning standards. Learning standards set out what students are expected to know, and how they can demonstrate performance to the required level of a given competency to provide a reference for assessment. This helps to ensure that national tests, teachers' classroom assessment and their feedback, to students are in line with national learning expectations.

A review of EU countries' implementation of the key competencies has found that specifying learning outcomes is important to provide the context in which key competencies, and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required for particular levels of competence will be developed (KeyCoNet, 2014). Outside the EU, many OECD countries including Australia, Chile, Korea, Mexico and New Zealand have also developed learning standards as part of the curriculum, or as a complement to it (OECD, 2013a).

Romania's new curriculum does include learning standards. The curriculum framework sets out what students should know and be able to do in the eight key competencies by the end of each education cycle. The grade curricula for traditional subject domains, and a specific programme for personal development are structured around the general competencies in terms of the skills, knowledge and attitudes that students are expected to develop over the year. These are broken down into the specific skills and related activities that support the development of the general competencies. Some details of how students would demonstrate achievement at each of these levels and associated activities to develop the specific skills are provided (see Box 2.2). This specification of expected student learning is positive.

**Box 2.2. Romania's learning standards for the new curriculum**

In December 2015 the IES published a framework for Romania's new curriculum, to guide the development of the new grade curricula, based on the eight key competencies that students are expected to develop during their education. The framework curriculum also aims to introduce a shift in learning to focus more on the student and their individual learning, and to develop a more integrated approach to learning across domains and competencies.

This framework sets out what students are expected to be able to do within each of the eight key competencies by the end of learning cycles. For example, by the end of Grade 4 the following is expected of students:

- **Communication in mother tongue:** identify facts and opinions, express ideas and messages, participate in verbal interactions in familiar contexts to solve school or life problems.
- **Communication in foreign languages:** identify information in simple contexts, express ideas or opinions in short messages, take part in simple verbal interactions.
- **Learning to learn:** identify the elements required by a task before starting a learning activity, formulate questions, use simple learning techniques, focus on a task until it is complete.

**Box 2.2. Romania's learning standards for the new curriculum *(continued)***

- **Social and civic competencies:** show interest towards self-knowledge, apply basic behaviour norms in daily contexts, take on roles and responsibilities, recognise and respect diversity (ethno-cultural, linguistic, religious, etc.).
- **Sensibility and cultural expression:** participate in cultural projects and recognise elements related to the local cultural context or to the national and/or universal cultural patrimony.

These overall learning objectives are further articulated in the curriculum for each subject and grade. For example, in Grade 4 students are expected to demonstrate the following competences associated with communication in their mother tongue:

- understand oral messages in various communication contexts
- express oral messages in various communication situations
- understand written messages in various communication contexts
- write messages in different communication contexts

The framework provides specific skills that students are expected to demonstrate to support the development of the general competence. For example, under the competence "understand oral messages in various communication contexts" students are expected to be able to:

- make simple inferences based on hearing a literary text or other accessible information
- make predictions based on text fragments heard
- offer simple conclusions from animated shorts / fragments of cartoons
- listen to some funny/interesting dialogues and identify the people involved (number and status, age, interests).

*Sources*: IES (2015), Repere Pentru Proiecarea Şi Actualizarea: Curriculumului National: Document de Politici Educationale, [For our projected milestones and updates: National Curriculum: Educational Policy Document], Institute of Educational Science, Bucharest, www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Document-politici-curriculum_final_23decembrie.pdf; MNESR (2014a), "Programa şcolară pentru disciplina LIMBA ŞI LITERATURA ROMÂNĂ CLASELE a III-a – a IV-a" [The syllabus for discipline LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE ROMANIAN CLASS III – IV].

However, in Romania the learning standards embedded in the curriculum do not play the foundational role that they should in the education system. During the OECD review team's interviews with teachers, there was no mention of how these standards guide their classroom planning, or how they shape their classroom assessment or feedback to students. In contrast, in countries such as New Zealand, learning standards are an integral part of the taught curriculum. In Romania, there also appeared to be little understanding among teachers of the differences between the old and the new curriculum, especially in terms of the implications of the new curriculum's competence-based approach for teaching and assessment practice.

There are several steps that Romania can take to build teachers' understanding of the learning expectations in the curriculum. The first is to further develop the current learning standards so that they provide greater specificity of expected learning outcomes. Second, providing marked examples of student work will help teachers to reliably assess student work according to national learning expectations. Using the current scales for classroom marking to set out levels of performance within the national learning standards would help teachers to relate the standards to their own classroom practices and establish a common language for describing performance. Finally, using the learning standards centrally in the design of other assessment and evaluation practices, in particular for the national examinations, but also the development of teacher standards and the school evaluation framework, is critical to ensure that the evaluation and assessment framework as a whole is focused on the teaching and learning that the new curriculum aims to encourage.

### *Strengthening the role of existing learning standards in Romania*

While Romania's current curriculum reform provides a strong foundation for standards-based alignment, the learning standards as currently articulated do not provide adequate guidance for assessment stakeholders, including test designers and classroom teachers, on what performance against these expected outcomes looks like and how it should be assessed. They do not clearly identify different levels of performance, which would enable teachers to assess whether a standard has been achieved and to what degree. Nor do they provide benchmarks on learning progressions towards expected outcomes, which would enable teachers to assess whether students are on the path towards acquiring specific skills. In other countries, such as New Zealand, learning standards explicitly set out the characteristics of student work at a given level of achievement alongside marked examples of student work to help teachers make consistent professional judgements about learners' levels of achievement. New Zealand has also developed a significant amount of accompanying material to develop teachers' understanding of, and ability to use, national learning standards (Box 2.3).

The current learning standards in Romania should be further developed, to be more specific about what students are expected to know and be able to do, and how they can demonstrate proficiency. Romania can be guided by the experience of other countries in this work, some of which have taken a selective approach and focused on core domains such as reading and writing, and mathematics. Given capacity constraints and the evidence that many Romanian students lack these essential foundations for further learning, Romania could take a similar approach. It will be critical that the NCAE and the IES cooperate closely on this work, and that they engage teachers to ensure that the strengthened learning standards provide useful guidance, while building ownership and understanding of the standards. Scotland (United Kingdom) is currently developing new "benchmarks" for learning in literacy and English, numeracy and mathematics to support the implementation of its "Curriculum for Excellence", and is conducting an open consultation on the draft benchmarks with teachers providing them with the opportunity to comment on them before they become final policy tools (Education Scotland, 2017).

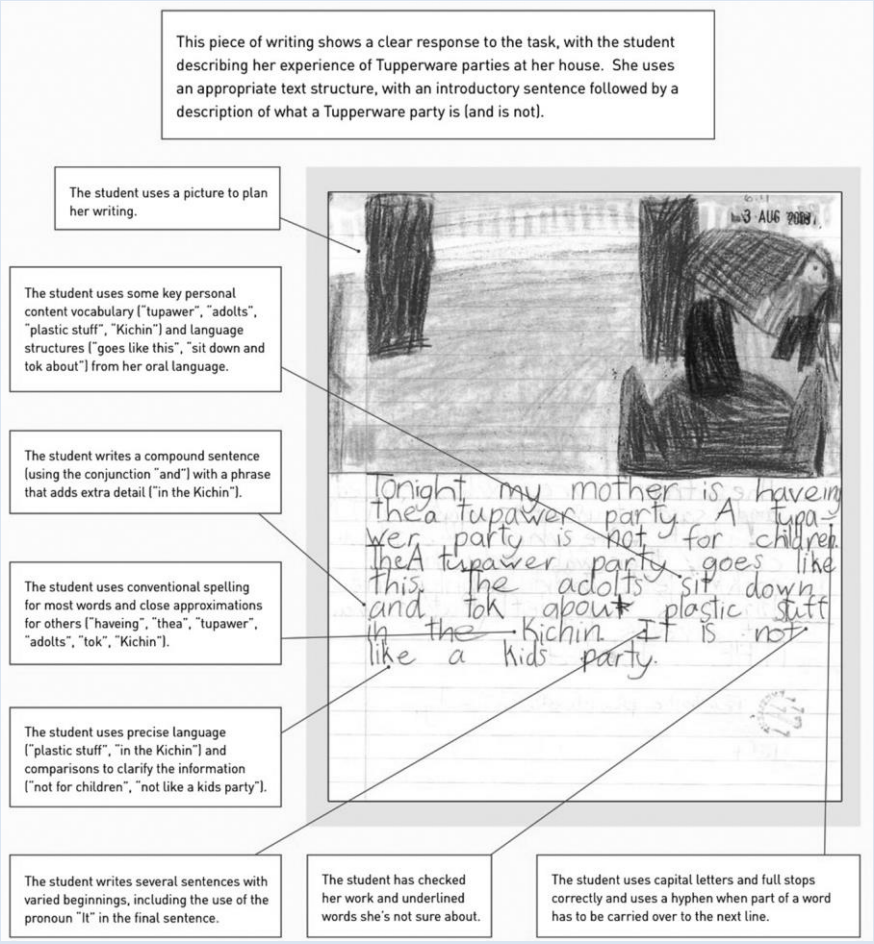
## Box 2.3. New Zealand's National Standards

New Zealand implemented national standards in 2010. The standards set clear expectations that students need to meet in reading, writing and mathematics during their first eight years at school. The national standards present expectations of what students should be able to do "after one year at school", "after two years at school", etc. Each standard sets out the overall standard, for example, according to the writing standard after two years at school students will "create texts in order to meet the writing demands of the New Zealand Curriculum at level 1. Students will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum."

Key characteristics further describe student writing at this level, and what their texts will include. For example, after two years at school student writing will typically include:

- experiences, information and/or ideas that relate to a curriculum topic, supported by some (mostly relevant) detail and/or personal comment.
- mainly simple and compound sentences that have some variation in their beginnings simple conjunctions used correctly, etc.

The standard is illustrated by different examples of student work, each with a commentary indicating why this student work is at the given standard (see figure).



**Box 2.3. New Zealand's National Standards *(continued)***

**Learning progressions** for reading, writing and mathematics alert teachers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children need to draw on in order to meet the national standards.

Teachers are also supported by a range of online assessment tools, available at a dedicated assessment website, Assessment Online (http://assessment.tki.org.nz/). The tools available include an assessment tool selector, assessment resource maps and an assessment resource bank to help teachers select the most appropriate tool from a range of formal and informal assessment methods to use in making overall judgements of students' progress and achievement.

As well as accompanying documentation on how to use and understand the national standards, teachers are supported by online **professional development** modules, that illustrate the national standards and help schools and teachers to understand the standards and how they relate to the curriculum have been developed to support teachers.

Concerns about the overall dependability and consistency of teacher judgements led to the development of the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) in 2012. The PaCT (http://pactinfo.education.govt.nz/) is an online resource to help teachers make their professional judgements using the national standards. It includes frameworks, developed with curriculum experts, that break down mathematics, reading and writing into different aspects to prompt teachers to notice what students know and can do across the breadth of these areas. Each aspect in the frameworks includes a number of learning stages that are illustrated by students' work on a range of tasks and problems.

*Source*: Ministry of Education (2017), "The standards", The New Zealand Curriculum Online website, http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Reading-and-writing-standards/The-standards.

Romania might develop a separate policy document on the learning standards to accompany the new grade curricula that have been released. It is important to ensure that the new standards and associated guidance are accessible so that teachers are able to consult them when they want, and use them as practical tools in their classrooms; Ireland's Curriculum Online website might serve as an example in this regard (Box 2.4). Important things to include on Romania's platform include:

- **Learning standards and performance descriptors**: clear statements of expected student learning and the key characteristics of student work by grade in the core domains of reading and writing, and mathematics. This should also include performance descriptors that set out the characteristics of student work at different levels of performance (see below).
- **Examples of students work:** accompanying the standards and levels of performance with examples of student work would help to develop teachers' understanding of the standards and their ability to apply them practically. The examples should be accompanied with commentary or marking from teachers to build teachers' understanding of what is required to reach a given level of achievement. The examples can be built up over time and include examples of both classroom-based assessment and external assessments and examinations.

- **Learning progressions.** Romania might also develop learning progressions as a supporting document for the learning standards. The learning progressions would set out how students typically move through learning in reading and writing, and mathematics in line with the expectations set out in the learning standards. These could be accompanied by examples of student work at the different learning stages. Learning progressions signal to teachers the knowledge and skills that students need to develop and be able to draw on so that they are able to meet the expectations of the curriculum and learning standards.

**Box 2.4. Supporting alignment between the curriculum and assessment in Ireland**

The recent curriculum reforms in Ireland have placed a strong emphasis on alignment of the curriculum and assessment. By accessing the curriculum online, teachers can click on some of the learning outcomes in the curriculum, to access examples of assessment tasks relevant to that outcome. These tasks have been undertaken by students, and marked by teachers using a 3 point scale – at expectations, ahead of expectations, or yet to meet expectations. In the guidelines on the end of junior cycle assessment (including a state examination) the same learning outcomes are referenced, and similar examples of student work with teacher commentary are used to help teachers and students to prepare for the test. The same learning outcomes inform test design.

*Source*: Curriculum Online (2016), "English", Curriculum Online website, http://curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Junior-Cycle-Subjects/English.

### *Relating learning standards to the current scales used for classroom assessment*

One way to develop clarity and understanding around national learning standards would be to use the current scales for classroom marking to set out levels of performance within the national learning standards, to enable teachers to see the direct connection between how they currently assess their students and national learning expectations. In primary education, this would mean setting out how different levels of performance within the national standards correspond to the four point scale of very good, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory. For example, a 'satisfactory' or 'good' mark might mean that a student had met the national learning expectations for that specific grade and subject, whereas 'very good' might indicate that they were currently exceeding national learning expectations. In secondary education, the same could be done using the 10 point numeric scale for classroom assessment to set out levels of performance within the learning standards. Providing an explanation of what the numerical mark signifies on the descriptor scale in terms of student performance would provide teachers and students with a better understanding of national expectations of student learning and progress, rather than a numerical mark which provides limited information to inform future student learning (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3. Illustrative example: Communication in the mother tongue, Grade 4**

| Learningstandard | Descriptor | Numericalmark |
|---|---|---|
| **Reading** | | |
| Providesahigh -leveldescriptionof standardthatsetsoutwhatstudents candoat thislevel. Setsouttypicalcharacteristicsofwork atthislevel. | Verygood | 8 -10 |
| | Good | 6 - 7.99 |
| | Satisfactory | 4 - 5.99 |
| | Unsatisfactory | 0 - 3.99 |

Descriptors using four -point scale for primary classroom assess ment describe different levels of performance within the learning standard.

Eachdescriptorsetsoutthecharacteristicsof studentwork atthelevelofperformanceand mightlinktoexamplesofstudentwork .

Illustration of performance descriptors using numeric scale for secondary education classroomassessment.

Each marking band sets out the characteristics of student work that would receivethismark,andmightlinktoexamples ofstudentwork.

Such an approach would help to develop a common language and approach for assessing performance in relation to national standards. It would also help to ground the new curriculum and standards in teachers' existing classroom practice. Teachers would understand how the marks that they give their students in classrooms correspond to national learning expectations. Developing teachers' understanding of national learning expectations and their ability to relate this to their classroom practice is essential to create the foundations for using the national diagnostic assessments more effectively and to build teachers' assessment literacy (see Policy Issue 2.3). It would also provide an objective basis for the awarding of classroom marks to encourage consistency and reliability, which does not currently exist.

### *Positioning standards as the key reference point for assessment and examinations*

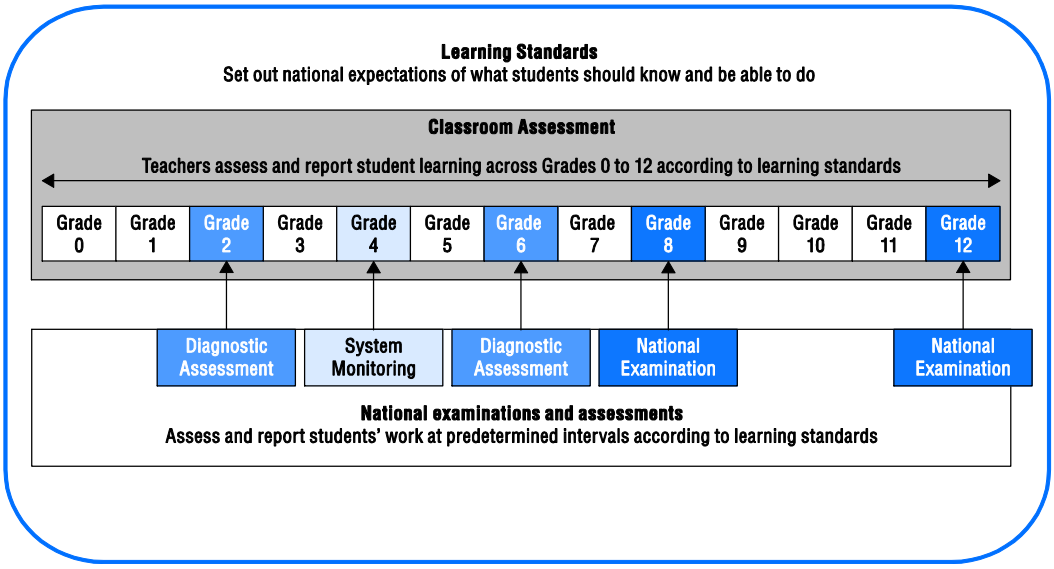
Further developing the standards will help to ensure that they are practical tools that shape assessment practice in classrooms and the development of external assessments and examinations. This will support coherence across external assessments and examinations and teachers' classroom assessment, and with the curriculum's expectations (Figure 2.3).

While Romania's new national assessments seek to evaluate student competencies, the national examinations continue to assess theoretical knowledge in distinct domains. To some extent, this reflects the fact that Romania is only now starting to roll out the new curriculum in lower secondary education, which is where preparation for the first major examination in Grade 8 begins. Given the stakes of the examination, and the influence it has on teaching and learning, it will be very important that the Grade 8 examination is revised to assess the learning outcomes that the curriculum is working towards. This should be done gradually, to ensure that students are prepared for the change, for example by progressively introducing more competency-based items (see Policy Issue 2.2). Strengthening teachers' understanding of national learning expectations as outlined above, and providing a national item bank of assessment items, will help to ensure that teachers are able to use more competency-based assessments in their classrooms to prepare students for this change to the national examination.

While the curriculum reform has not yet reached upper secondary education, there is also scope to adapt the Grade 12 baccalaureate, even on the basis of the current curriculum, so that it includes more questions that encourage students to apply what they have learned in different contexts and demonstrate higher order abilities like critical thinking and problem solving. This will be important not just to orient the system towards the same expectations, but also to ensure that students are well prepared for a knowledge economy. At present, international assessments show that the majority of Romanian students struggle with more complex tasks (see Chapter 1).

The learning standards should also provide the foundations for ensuring coherence across the whole evaluation and assessment framework (see Figure 2.3). They would guide the development of professional standards for teachers, which set out what a teacher should know and be able to do (see Chapter 3). Equally, the national learning standards should also inform the development of the definition of a good school and the criteria that is used to evaluate schools, as well as what a principal should know and be able to do, in principal standards (see Chapter 4). This will provide the guidance and coherence to help ensure that schools provide a teaching and learning environment where students are supported to meet national learning expectations. Ensuring that the learning standards inform teacher and school standards in this way would also be a powerful lever to increase their visibility and support coherence across the evaluation and assessment framework. Adopting national goals linked to learning standards in the new national strategy for education would further emphasise their role nationally (see Chapter 5).

**Figure 2.3. Using learning standards to align the assessment system in Romania**




## *Using national assessments to communicate learning standards*

The new assessments introduced in Grades 2 and 6 have been designed with explicit reference to the new curriculum and focus on assessing the key competencies that students are expected to acquire by the end of the grades. These diagnostic assessments can help to develop a better understanding among teachers and learners as to what national learning standards signify in terms of acquired knowledge and skills, complementing other resources like examples of student work and learning progressions. Providing teachers with guidance on how to interpret, grade and report student's

performance in the domains assessed would help to achieve this. Such support would not only help in communicating learning standards but also in developing teachers' assessment skills and ensuring that the results of the diagnostic assessments are used, as they were intended, to encourage more individualised instruction and learning (see Policy Issue 2.3).

Classroom teachers are responsible for marking the national assessments, which is helpful for developing teachers' understanding of national standards. However, the central marking guidelines that are provided for teachers simply indicate the responses that should be marked as correct, or partially correct. Improved guidance for teachers when marking students' work in the national assessments, linked to the curriculum's learning standards, could help to develop teachers' understanding of what is expected of students and how to assess their performance. For open-ended questions, this might include marking guidance on how to interpret student work that is below, meets or exceeds national expectations for student learning linked to the four point descriptor scale (see above) accompanied by examples of student work at these different levels.

Currently, the national assessments do not result in a numerical or descriptor mark, rather students receive a two page report indicating which responses were correct, partially correct, and incorrect, and their overall strengths and weaknesses. The rationale for adopting this approach is positive, to avoid that stakes are associated with the assessments and to encourage their diagnostic use. However, reporting in this way provides little indication as to a student's level of learning according to national expectations and is a missed opportunity to develop teachers' knowledge of learning standards.

Reporting the national assessment results according to the learning standards, and adopting the four point descriptor scale used for classroom assessment would help the assessments to provide meaningful information about a student's learning in line with national expectations. For example, a student's results from the Grade 2 national examination in communication in the mother tongue might indicate if a student is meeting the learning expectations for the overall competence (e.g. indicated by a 'satisfactory' result), and also for each of the specific competencies covered by the assessment. A commentary on why the mark was awarded would also be useful. After the new curriculum has been implemented in lower and upper secondary, and the national examinations revised in line with this to assess competence, the reporting of the examination results should also be adapted to include reporting according to the learning standards.

### *Clarifying responsibilities for learning standards*

Further developing Romania's learning standards will require significant collaboration right across the education system. The IES, as the developer of the curriculum framework and co-ordinator of the grade curricula, will play a key role. Equally important is the role of the NCAE, which will design and administer the national assessments and examinations based on the learning standards. Successful collaboration between these two organisations, and with the MNESR, will be critical to strengthening the existing standards.

Other countries have successfully developed standards with a similar organisational arrangement across two separate organisations. In Ireland, curriculum and standards are set through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, but the examinations are designed and delivered by the State Examinations Commission. The Netherlands'

Institute for Curriculum Development is responsible for the curriculum, but a different agency, the Central Institute for Test Development, organises testing. In such contexts, success depends on close working relationships and clear oversight and policy direction from the respective ministries.

In Romania, it will be important to clarify the roles of the IES and the NCAE, and their respective relationships to the ministry, in order to support a close working relationship and develop a shared understanding of what student performance against national standards means. Key functions like analysing exam results and administering international assessments have been moved between the two bodies. To help ensure that learning standards are strengthened, one organisation should explicitly be given the responsibility to do this work. Otherwise there is a risk that the standards will remain as they currently are – something recognised as important but which no organisation is responsible for. Ensuring sufficient and consistent resourcing levels is also important so that both organisations are able to perform this work (see Policy Issue 2.4).

## Policy Issue 2.2: Mitigating the negative impact of the national examinations on student learning and progression

Romania's two national examinations carry high stakes for students, teachers and schools. In common with other high-stakes examinations they have consequences for students by determining selection into subsequent education levels, and also affect teacher accountability and the reputation of schools. The publication of student results in a national high school ranking based on the Grade 8 national examination results and their use in teacher appraisal add to the exams' high stakes.

High-stakes examinations are common to many educational systems, as are their limitations. In Romania, the influential role of the exams in determining a student's future creates particularly negative consequences for the breadth and depth of student learning, motivation and equity of achievement. Reforming the examinations, particularly the Grade 8 examination, will be essential if Romania is to achieve the positive changes in teaching and learning set out in the new curriculum, and create a more equitable system where students from all backgrounds can succeed.

### *Reforming Romania's examinations as the sine-qua-non for improving assessment and learning*

Romania's two national examinations carry high stakes for individual students, playing a significant role in determining their future life choices. While high-stakes examinations are common in many countries to determine students' future educational pathways, they are associated with many limitations. This means they need to be well designed and administered, and appropriate use is made of their results to mitigate their negative impacts. Conscious of the negative impact of high-stakes exams on student learning and motivation, some countries have developed dedicated policies to reduce their consequences. Although Romania has improved the reliability of its national examinations, it has no clear policy to reduce their high stakes and the associated challenges.

### *Impact on student learning and motivation*

High-stakes examinations can have a significant impact on student learning and motivation. As an examination approaches, students focus on learning for the test (Smyth, 2016). Preparation for tests can dominate learning as students begin to actively resist classroom practice they see as irrelevant to test preparation, narrowing learning. In Romania, it was reported to the OECD review team during interviews how the high-stakes examinations shape student learning. The Grade 8 exam only tests Romanian language and mathematics (and language and literature in the minority language for students also following this curriculum); and teachers told the review team in interviews that this means basic knowledge is not being developed in the subjects that are not tested, such as science, geography or history. In addition, an unusual feature of the Grade 12 baccalaureate is that in some subjects it tests content from earlier grades. For example, in physics it tests content from Grades 9 and 10. This means students have little motivation for learning in such subjects in the final two grades of upper secondary education.

The impact of the examinations on student learning and motivation are not confined to students in Grades 8 and 12. The "backwash" – the effect of examinations on what happens in the classroom – from these examinations, particularly the Grade 8 examination, reaches back into earlier grades. Indeed, the assessment system is designed to channel backwash, because the final Grade 8 results includes marks from school assessments in Grades 5-8. While this may reduce the stakes of the individual examination in Grade 8, it does mean that there are high stakes attached to students' classroom work which may reduce the likelihood that students are prepared to reveal gaps in their knowledge or that they feel it is safe to make mistakes, which are integral to effective learning.

High-stakes examinations can also encourage disengagement among students less likely to perform well in them. Students perceive that the test's difficulty means they will never perform well so they become demotivated and may eventually drop out. This situation occurs more frequently among low income, minority and low-performing students (OECD, 2013d).

There is strong evidence that Romania's high-stakes examinations may be creating such disengagement, particularly the baccalaureate. One-fifth of Romania's student population drops out of school by the age of 16. While it is clearly not the sole factor, dropout rates in Grades 11 and 12 prior to the baccalaureate are higher among groups of students who perform less well in the examination – that is, students in technological high schools and those attending school in rural areas where the pass rate is significantly below the national average (Fartuşnic et al., 2014). In addition, an increasing share of eligible students are choosing not to take the baccalaureate exam. In 2009 nearly all eligible students chose to sit the exam, but by 2013 this had fallen by 20%. While this may reflect an improving vocational offer (see Chapter 1), the fall also coincides with the introduction of cameras and may reflect the perceived increased difficulty of the exam (MNESR, 2015).

### *Equity and fairness*

Romania's high-stakes examinations create concerns around fairness and equity. In all OECD countries, socio-economic background is a significant determinant of educational achievement (OECD, 2013b). It is particularly acute in Romania, where there are significant inequalities in educational opportunity and performance, especially between students from urban and rural backgrounds at all stages of the education system.

The high-stakes examinations amplify these inequities, by making important decisions about a student's future based on their performance in examinations which is strongly influenced by factors beyond their control. This raises serious concerns about the fairness and validity of the national examinations as the means to evaluate students' aptitude for future learning.

Because Romania does not collect student background data, it is hard to analyse its impact on student performance, but the available evidence shows that student achievement in examinations is heavily influenced by socio-economic factors. There is a significant difference between the performance of rural and urban students. In 2014, the success rate in the baccalaureate was 17% higher among students living in urban areas than in rural areas (MNESR, 2014b).The IES's analysis of the Grade 8 mock exam results in 2016 similarly found that the average grade in rural areas was 1.38 points lower than in urban areas. Equally, in regions with lower levels of economic development, student performance was lower (IES, 2016). While the report acknowledges its limitations, given the significant number of absentees who do not take the test and the absence of the stakes associated with the "real" test, it nevertheless provides important contextual analysis of performance.

Results from PISA also indicate that Romania's education system is not as effective as others at recognising and nurturing the talent of students from lower income groups. In Romania, just 11% of students overcame a low socio-economic background to perform among the top share of students nationally in science in PISA 2015. By contrast, in Poland and Slovenia 35% of low income students were top performers in science, above the average for OECD countries of 29% (OECD, 2016a).

### *Private tutoring*

The considerable stakes for individual students associated with Romania's examinations means that many parents employ private tutors for their children. While the costs and scale of private tutoring are not well recorded, it is reported that some families are paying up to EUR 1 250 annually for tutoring in the secondary cycle (Save the Children, 2010). One study estimated that the overall cost to Romanian households was EUR 300 million annually (European Commission, 2011). It was indicated to the OECD review team during interviews that the vast majority of Grade 8 and Grade 12 students have private tutors. The practice is particularly widespread among students in the more prestigious theoretical and vocational high schools. Private tutoring exists in many countries but the scale of its use in Romania is problematic since it increases the inequalities of the system, providing more advantaged students with an additional advantage that students from lower income groups may not be able to access.

### *Consequences for students' educational pathways*

It is normal for high-stakes examinations, like Romania's baccalaureate, to be an important factor in students' future education choices. It is less usual for a high-stakes examination to be taken as young as 14 years old, before the end of compulsory education, especially one with such a fundamental influence on a student's educational choices as Romania's Grade 8 exam. Early tracking exacerbates differences in learning between students; it increases inequity since tracking is more likely to place students from disadvantaged groups in lower or vocational tracks and the earlier the tracking occurs, the less easy is it for students to switch between tracks later (OECD, 2012). In Romania, the

variability in different high schools' completion rates and student learning outcomes means that the high school that students attend is highly influential in determining their future life chances.

Systems that "track students" in this way usually use a range of measures to mitigate the consequences for particular groups of students, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged families and communities. Such measures might include ensuring permeability between the different tracks or targeted support to help well-performing students from less advantaged backgrounds access university. For example, students in the Netherlands take a test at the age of 12, but the results are just one element of the evidence used to decide the kind of programme they follow and students are actively involved in the choice of school (OECD, 2012; Box 2.5).

**Box 2.5. Mitigating the negative effects of early tracking in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands students are tracked into one of eight different programmes when transitioning from primary to secondary education at 12 years. These eight programmes cover four broad orientations: practical training (four years in duration), pre-vocational programmes (four years in duration), senior general education (five years in duration to prepare students for applied subjects at the university level) and pre-university education (six years in duration, to prepare students for tertiary education) (OECD, 2016b). Students are tracked by ability on the basis of teacher advice and their results in an end of primary test.

Some cross-country studies have found that early tracking increases inequity with no clear effect on average achievement (OECD 2016b), however the Netherlands has been able to achieve relatively high levels of performance while ensuring equity in education. While there is a high degree of variation in student performance between schools, this variation is not associated with greater socio-economic segregation of students across schools than the average in OECD countries. The variation in student performance that is attributable to students' socio-economic background is only 12.5%, slightly below the average across OECD countries of 12.9%.

The Netherlands has put in place policies and practices that mitigate the negative effects of early tracking for equity:

**A strong vocational system**

A considerable proportion of students are selected into the vocational track, nearly half in 2015. Quality vocational education is supported by comparatively high spending, with annual per student spending more than twice the OECD average. The vocational system also has strong links to the labour market. Overall the strong vocational system helps to ensure that its students receive education on par with other programmes and have opportunities to achieve their full potential.

**Track mobility and flexibility**

Through track mobility and flexibility, the Dutch school system is able to reduce the negative consequences of placing students into programmes that do not correspond to their current or potential performance, with students able to transfer between programmes. When needed, secondary schools have the freedom to delay selection in the first year of secondary schools through "bridge classes", giving schools an additional year to better assess a student's potential for the various education tracks.

Further, graduates from all tracks can purse tertiary education through the framework of "scaffolding" diplomas. These diplomas allow students to proceed to the next education level automatically upon graduation from their track level (OECD, 2016b).

**Box 2.5. Mitigating the negative effects of early tracking in the Netherlands *(continued)***

**Equitable allocation of funds and additional mechanisms to target funding**

Public funds are allocated equitably across public and private schools. The Netherlands is one of the few countries participating in PISA where principals in socio-economically disadvantaged schools are not more concerned than principals in advantaged schools about the resources in their schools.

Additional funding mechanisms provide schools with block grants based on their student population. At the primary level, schools receive government grants based on the educational background of students' parents and at the secondary level schools receive extra funds for disadvantaged students based on the school's location. Schools may also receive targeted funding for special purposes e.g. dropout prevention.

Other characteristics of the Dutch education system that help to mitigate the negative effects of tracking on equity include almost universal pre-primary education, strong accountability and school autonomy in compulsory education, and comparatively high spending on secondary education compared with other OECD countries.

*Source*: OECD (2016b), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools,* PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en. ;OECD (2016c), *Netherlands 2016: Foundations for the Future,* Reviews of National Policies for education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264257658-6-en.

Romania does not have any policies to mitigate the consequences of tracking for certain groups of students. This is particularly problematic given that students' socio-economic status, or whether they live in a rural or urban area, is a strong determinant of their Grade 8 examination result, further adding to the inequality in Romania's school system. For all of these reasons, reforming Romania's two high-stakes examinations, and particularly the Grade 8 test, is of national importance.

### *Improving the quality and fairness of the Grade 8 examination*

First, and most immediately, Romania should make sure that the Grade 8 examination is fair and reliable. Secondly, over the medium term, Romania should review the use of the examination for tracking students into different educational pathways.

#### *Broadening the domains and competencies assessed*

Currently, the domains assessed in Grade 8 are limited to Romanian language and literature and mathematics. Clearly not all the eight key competencies in the curriculum can be effectively assessed by a national examination but extending the range of subjects would help to encourage broader learning across the curriculum.

The tasks that students are required to complete should also be addressed. Operationally, the national scale of centralised examinations means that they also need to be cost-effective, and administered and scored over a short period of time. In many other OECD and EU countries these constraints mean that open-ended writing tasks, closed-format short answers and multiple-choice questions are often favoured over more creative assessment items, such as a problem to solve or a scenario to discuss and analyse (OECD, 2013d). Romania's two high-stakes examinations also use multiple choice items, closed-format short answers and open-ended writing tasks. Such tasks can assess complex

competencies, but their design and quality are crucial. Multiple choice tests must be of a high quality if they are to assess higher-order skills and constructed responses items such as essay writing require careful guidance for human assessors to rate performance levels reliably and accurately (OECD/UNESCO, 2016). The OECD review team's interviews with teachers suggested that these important quality controls may not be in place in Romania, with teachers reporting that students memorise content to prepare for the Grade 8 exam, for which they have no use afterwards.

In the future, once the new curriculum has been implemented across all grades, Romania may also consider introducing competency-based assessments that combine assessment of a student's knowledge of a topic with their ability to apply that knowledge to solve the problems or situations presented to them (OECD/UNESCO, 2016). Such assessments should be introduced progressively so that students have the opportunity to become familiar with this type of assessment. Romania might learn from the examples of other countries such as Poland, which has recently reformed its selection examinations towards a competency-based test. Since tutoring for competency-based tests is more difficult, this may also help to curb private tutoring, with positive consequences for equity. Given the challenges associated with the baccalaureate examination in Romania, similar reforms should be considered for this examination too.

### *Reviewing the composition of the final grade*

Romania needs to critically consider the benefits of including student marks from all of lower secondary (Grades 5 to 8), and marks for behaviour and attendance in the final examination result for Grade 8. In theory, including such classroom-based assessment marks should broaden the range of knowledge and competence included in the final mark. Yet in practice, since these marks tend to be generated through summative pen-and-paper tests, using them risks just including more of the same type of assessment that the final examination mark provides.

As a first step, the practice of including marks for behaviour should be ended. There is no evidence that this approach is successful in improving student behaviour. It has been phased out in other countries (OECD, 2012). The number of years that are assessed should also be reduced so that the final Grade 8 mark is a more accurate reflection of students' current development and to reduce the examination's impact on learning in the early years of lower secondary. The marks assessed for the final mark might be reduced to just those from Grades 7 and 8.

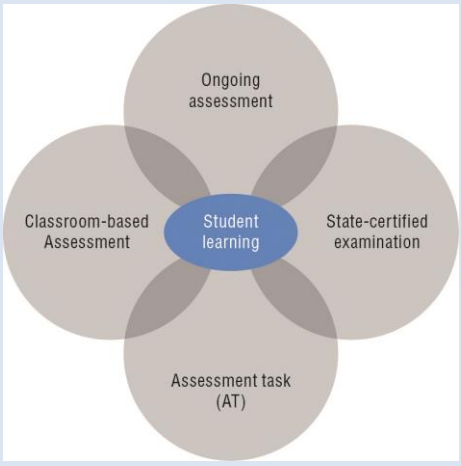
Priority should be given to improving the consistency and reliability of the marks for classroom-based assessments. One way to do this is for classroom work to be marked by teachers who would then meet with colleagues from the same school to "moderate" the marks using the curriculum's standards and examples of student work. The focus of the meetings would be the standard of achievement demonstrated by the work, rather than to check on whether procedure was followed. A sample of items might be externally checked to ensure consistency in classroom marking nationally. Such a process has the added benefit of increasing the visibility and impact of standards across the system. Ireland has recently adopted such an approach, as part of scaling back its end of lower secondary external examination. It introduced school marks for learning that is difficult to assess in traditional examinations, alongside a scaled-back external examination (Box 2.6).

### Box 2.6. Ireland's reforms to the Junior Cycle

Ireland has recently reformed its first three years of lower secondary – the Junior Cycle – to provide students with quality learning opportunities that balance learning knowledge and develop a wide range of skills and thinking abilities. The most significant change in the new Junior Cycle is in the area of assessment, which is now based on:

- ongoing formative assessments, including routine teacher-designed tasks and tests
- structured classroom-based assessments conducted in second and third years
- assessment of learning arising from short courses or priority learning units
- the written assessment task following the second classroom-based assessment
- the results of the summative state examination.

The reform aims to reduce the focus on one externally assessed examination as a means of assessing students (the traditional examination at the end of lower secondary), and increase the prominence of classroom-based assessment and formative assessment. This emphasis on classroom assessment is based on research which shows that the greatest benefits for students' learning occur when teachers provide effective feedback to students that helps them to understand how their learning can be improved. Classroom assessments should use a variety of assessment approaches that allow students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and skills and their ability to apply them in ways that would not be possible in a written exam. The interlinked and complementary nature of student learning, ongoing assessment, classroom-based assessment, the assessment task and the state-certified examination is set out below:




**Ongoing formative assessment**

Teachers will use the national learning outcomes that clearly set out what the students should know, understand and be able to do as a starting point for planning a unit of learning and to develop learning intentions and success criteria to be shared and discussed with their students. They will use their learning intentions and success criteria as the basis for providing feedback to help students plan their next steps in learning. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on how they are progressing in their own learning and provide feedback to their teachers.

**Classroom-based assessments**

For each subject, two structured classroom-based assessments facilitated by a student's classroom teacher, will be introduced to contribute to and build on formative assessment in the classroom. One takes place in the second year and the other during the third year. Each assessment is based on a variety of assessment types, which might include project tasks, oral language tasks, investigations, practical or designing and making tasks, field studies and artistic performance.

**Box 2.6. Ireland's reforms to the Junior Cycle *(continued)***

The comparability and consistency of the classroom-based assessments will be ensured by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) specifying the assessment tasks and designing some of them. Schools will have the flexibility to select those tasks that best meet their programme and students' learning needs. The NCCA will also develop standards or reference points for the classroom-based assessments that describe performance at a number of levels, accompanied by exemplars of students' work at the different levels. The provision of standards and exemplars of work will provide teachers with a clear framework within which to evaluate the work of their own students for assessment purposes.

**Assessment task**

The second classroom-based assessment for each subject will be followed by a formal written assessment task based on the topic or task undertaken in the second classroom-based assessment. This assessment task will be marked centrally along with the state-certified, final examination at the end of lower secondary in the subject.

**Reporting**

At the end of lower secondary students will receive the composite Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) from his/her school. The JCPA draws upon and reports on achievement across all elements of assessment including ongoing, formative assessment; classroom-based assessments and results from the state-certified examinations and the assessment tasks.

**Professional support and collaboration**

Professional development and collaboration between teachers is central to informing their understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and their practice in the classroom. Under the new reforms, teachers involved in teaching and assessing the classroom-based components will engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings in the school where they will share and discuss samples of their assessments of students' work. This will help to build a common understanding about the quality of students' learning to help ensure consistency and fairness within and across schools in the appraisal of student learning. A support service for teachers will also help them to use the NCCA standards collaboratively with other teachers in the school.

*Source*: Department of Education and Skills (2015), *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*, Department of Education and Skills, Dublin, www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015-2.pdf.

Once the reliability of classroom marking is improved, it might account for an increased proportion of the Grade 8 final mark with less emphasis on the external examination. The work assessed might include projects or investigations in school. Investigations of this kind could involve an interdisciplinary approach, and could focus on competence rather than on disciplinary knowledge. Similar options for more project-based school work and controlled assessment might be considered for the Grade 12 examinations.

These options would need to be accompanied by the strengthening and use of learning standards across the system (see Policy Issue 2.1), and a programme of capacity building for teachers to support their understanding of, and skills for, assessment (see Policy Issue 2.3).

### *Improving the analysis of results*

More sophisticated analysis of items used in the examination would provide the data to increasingly improve its quality. Modern item analysis such as item response theory (IRT) would provide greater understanding of the quality and efficiency of items used in examinations. Currently the NCAE has no capacity to do this type of analysis. Making the resources available to recruit psychometricians with these analytical skills would provide the insights needed to help select better quality items over time, and develop a national item bank, to improve test design (see Policy Issue 2.4).

## ***Reviewing learning pathways in secondary education***

Romania's future social and economic development depends on improving the learning outcomes of all its students. This means creating an education system where students from all backgrounds can access high-quality education that recognises a broad set of learning needs and capabilities. Improving the design and quality of the Grade 8 examination will help, but its position and role within the secondary education system should also be reviewed. The Grade 8 and baccalaureate examinations are effectively gatekeeper examinations that serve to identify an elite with the academic skills for higher education while reducing the educational opportunities for other students. The examination system in many other EU and OECD countries shares this historical function. However, as countries seek to adapt their education systems to the broad-based needs of their modern economies they are trying to improve the learning pathways and approaches to certification in secondary school so that students remain in education for longer and gain recognition for a wider range of skills. Romania is yet to develop such a strong, coherent reform agenda for addressing the negative effects of a highly selective and unequal secondary school system.

### *Policy approaches to learning and assessment in secondary education are fragmented*

Concerns about high dropout rates and poor learning outcomes in many of Romania's technological high schools, and poor transition rates to tertiary education have led to increasing policy focus on the quality of upper secondary schooling. This has led to new initiatives including the World Bank-funded Romania Secondary Education Project (ROSE Project), which aims to improve retention in upper secondary and transition to tertiary education. The ROSE project also has a mandate to consider the introduction of a national assessment at the end of compulsory education in Grade 10. Important efforts are also underway as part of the National Strategy for Vocational Education to upgrade Romania's vocational schools and enhance their attractiveness to students and relevance for the labour market. This includes measures to improve the assessment and certification of technical skills so that students' qualifications are more closely aligned with the European Qualifications Framework and are recognised by employers.

These initiatives focus on important challenges facing Romanian secondary education and the proposed policies on assessment address identified gaps in learning recognition. However, they do not appear to be connected to each other or to form part of a systematic policy for secondary education reform. They are led by different units funded by different external sources, raising cross-government co-ordination challenges, although since 2016 a Secretary of State has been made responsible for cross-ministry co-ordination in this area. The initiatives raise several unanswered questions, such as the implications for the

Grade 8 examination of introducing an assessment in Grade 10, and how the Grade 12 baccalaureate would need to evolve to recognise technical and applied domains. It is also unclear how technical qualifications might align with university entry requirements.

### *Romania needs to develop a coherent policy agenda for secondary education*

If these measures are to lead to real improvements in participation and learning outcomes they need to be part of a coherent reform agenda for the full secondary education cycle. It will be important to address centrally some of the current aspects of secondary schooling that pose particular barriers to progression, such as tracking from 14 years, rigidity across different tracks in upper secondary, great variety in quality across different schools, and the lack of mechanisms to enable disadvantaged students to progress and access high-quality schooling and university.

While Grade 9, and the end of lower secondary exam, has been moved between lower and upper secondary in recent years, the idea of postponing selection to Grade 9 or 10 does not appear to be under discussion as part of the current initiatives to improve secondary education. This is something that Romania might want to reopen. As discussed above, countries are increasingly moving to delay selection to create more comprehensive systems, giving students equal learning opportunities for longer, at least until the end of compulsory education, and keeping pathways between programmes and schools open. In 1999 Poland implemented structural reforms to develop a more comprehensive model of lower secondary education with equal access to education opportunities that included deferring selection by one year. This has resulted in documentable gains in student achievement, in particular, among disadvantaged student groups (OECD, 2013c; Box 2.7).

**Box 2.7. Poland's reforms for a comprehensive lower secondary gymnasium**

In the early 1990s Poland had one of the lowest participation rates in full secondary education and in higher education in the OECD. In 1999 it implemented structural reforms to increase the number of people with secondary and higher education qualifications by ensuring equal educational opportunities, and supporting improvements in the quality of education.

The reforms created a new type of school – the lower secondary gymnasium, a comprehensive school for all students. This created a new education structure of 6+3+3 – six years of primary school followed by three years in a comprehensive lower secondary gymnasium. This replaced a previous system where students remained in primary school for eight years and were then tracked into different streams based on their performance in the placement exams (the *kuratoria*). The top 20% went into the three-year general secondary lyceum, where they took academic courses to prepare for the university entry examination (the *matura*). The bottom half went into two-year basic vocational schools run by individual sector industries and the remaining students went into two-year technical secondary schools to prepare as technicians. Under the new system all students follow the same common curriculum until the age of 15, extending comprehensive education by one year.

This structural reform was accompanied by a new core curriculum for the lower secondary gymnasium which set the expectation that all students should be taught to equal standards set out in national curricula standards. Curriculum development was decentralised to the local level to engage teachers and schools, and an accountability system of central examinations was used to monitor results.

**Box 2.7. Poland's reforms for a comprehensive lower secondary gymnasium *(continued)***

Studies suggest that this structural reform has helped to reduce performance differences between schools, and to improve the performance of the lowest-achieving students. In PISA 2000, Poland's average score was well below the OECD average and 21% of students only reached the lowest of PISA's competency levels, Level 1. Students attending the basic vocational schools performed significantly below their peers in the general education system, with nearly 70% performing at the lowest literacy level. By 2003, Poland's average student performance had improved, and notably, Poland saw the greatest decrease in performance difference between schools of all OECD countries.

The trend continued in 2006 PISA where studies found a 115 point improvement among those students who would previously have attended the basic vocational schools but now received an additional year of general education in the new comprehensive lower secondary gymnasium.

*Sources:* OECD (2011), *Lessons from PISA for the United States,* OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1787/9789264096660-en; OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en.

## Policy issue 2.3: Supporting teachers' assessment literacy

Romania has modernised its education system significantly in recent decades. However, the legacy of the previous regime, characterised by centralisation, control and a focus on information and memorisation, still frame many aspects of schooling. In particular, classroom assessment is often limited to pen-and-paper summative tests, with limited use of formative assessment. If teaching and learning in Romania is to change, it will be imperative to develop teachers' assessment literacy. Of all educational policy interventions, formative assessment is found to have some of the most significant positive impacts on student achievement (Black and William, 1998). At the same time, central tests are limited in the range and complexity of the competencies that they are able to assess, leaving a gap that teacher-based assessment needs to address. Developing an assessment system that encourages teaching and learning across the full range of Romania's new curriculum will require improving teachers' knowledge and skills in assessment.

### *Encouraging formative assessment*

Formative assessment in classrooms refers to frequent, interactive assessments of students' progress and understanding to identify learning needs and adjust teaching appropriately (OECD, 2005a). It occurs during the learning process itself to provide information that is used to shape and deepen subsequent learning (OECD, 2013d). An important principle in defining formative assessment is its purpose, which is to support student learning. For this reason, the phrase "assessment for learning" has emerged as a way to articulate the particular role of formative assessment. At the heart of assessment for learning practices is high-quality feedback from teachers on student learning. This feedback, often without numeric scores or ranking, can guide students in the next steps of their learning, and motivate them to achieve (Box 2.8).

**Box 2.8. A framework for formative assessment**

In a review of formative assessment practice in classrooms, the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) identified six elements that featured in classrooms with strong practice. They are presented in the white circles below. In 2016, reviewing a decade of intense activity across school systems in introducing formative assessment policies and practices, Harlen (2016) identified the key features of a formative assessment framework. Some overlap with the earlier OECD/CERI analysis, but she notes some additional emphases, particularly on student involvement. These are presented in the dark blue circles.

*Sources*: OECD (2008), "Assessment for learning: Formative assessment", OECD/CERI International Conference on Learning in the 21st Century: Research, Innovation and Policy, OECD Publishing, Paris, www.oecd.org/site/educeri21st/40600533.pdf; Harlen, W. (2016), *Assessment of Learning*, SAGE Publication, Bristol.

The achievement gains that result from formative classroom assessment practices have been found to be among the most significant of any educational intervention, especially among low-achieving students (Black and William, 1998). Assessment for learning is also used to improve student engagement, which is important for all students but especially for those at risk of dropping out. Given the strong, positive impact that formative assessment is found to have on student learning, most school systems are adopting these policies, particularly in secondary education when student engagement and motivation are a concern (Box 2.9).

**Box 2.9. OECD countries' policies to support the use of formative assessment in classrooms**

Many OECD countries are moving towards putting in place policy frameworks that support and promote formative assessment, in recognition of the positive impact that it can have on student learning. Romania can draw on some of the experiences and strategies of these countries as it develops its own strategy to encourage greater use of formative assessment in its classrooms:

**Ireland: Guidelines and tools to promote the use of formative assessment in classrooms**

In Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has contributed to the development of expertise in formative assessment through its curriculum development projects with schools. As part of its work with groups of teachers in its Primary School Network, the NCCA explores how formative assessment approaches can be implemented in Irish classrooms. The NCCA has also designed materials to support teachers and schools in expanding their assessment toolkit. Its Assessment for Learning website includes multi-media support and materials such as classroom video footage and samples of children's work with teacher commentary. There are also reflection tools and checklists to support individual teachers and school staff in reviewing current assessment practice (http://action.ncca.ie/primary.aspx).

**Norway: Developing teacher capacity in formative assessment**

In Norway, schools now have a statutory requirement to implement assessment for learning. To support teachers in fulfilling the requirements for formative assessment, the Directorate for Education and Training has created a website on assessment for learning providing a range of materials and tools including questions for reflection, films, assessment tools and literature, and also examples of different ways to document formative assessment practice.

At the same time, there has been a developing awareness that teachers have not traditionally received training in formative assessment and that there was very little expertise available nationally for school leaders to draw on to provide support. To address this, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training in Norway identified formative assessment as a priority area for education policy and professional development and launched a range of support programmes and learning networks at the regional, local and school level. For example, the Assessment for Learning programme (2010-14) was organised in learning networks at the local and regional level, where practitioners could exchange experiences and create spaces for common reflection on effective practice. Participating municipalities and counties employed a formative assessment contact person to assist in running the project locally. These contact persons attended Assessment for Learning workshops run by the Directorate. The programme also provided online resources including tools and videos on how to enact effective formative assessment in the classroom.

*Sources*: OECD (2013d), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en;

Formative assessment features centrally in the description of student assessment set out in Romania's 2011 Education Law. Yet the reality in Romanian classrooms is that summative assessment continues to dominate. There was little evidence in the documents reviewed by the OECD review team, or in the engagement with teachers, schools and system leaders, of an understanding of "assessment for learning". During the review team's discussions with teachers and system leaders, when "formative assessment" was raised it was generally seen as series of summative assessments designed at school level. For example, the convention of recording the marks of

classroom tests or homework assignments in a central register in Grades 5-10 was described as "formative assessment". However, none of these assessment practices include the type of high-quality feedback to students on their learning and advice on the next steps to take to improve or succeed that is characteristic of formative assessment.

### *Identifying and overcoming the barriers to formative assessment*

Most systems struggle to achieve a balance between assessment of, and for learning, even when promoting formative assessment as one of the key national policies for improvement (OECD, 2013d). Even relatively high-performing, well-resourced school systems with highly regarded teachers have struggled to reorient their assessment systems from assessment of learning for accountability towards assessment for student learning.

Building a culture and capacity for formative assessment takes time and sustained policies. The experience of countries that have made a concerted effort to strengthen formative assessment, such as Norway, highlights that success depends above all on teachers and the wider framework for evaluation and assessment (Box 2.10). It is imperative that teachers understand the value of formative assessment for their students' learning, which will help to overcome professional resistance, and how to use it effectively in their classrooms. It is also critical that there is space for formative assessment in the evaluation and assessment framework, and that the pressure created by high-stakes examinations for students, teachers and schools is reduced.

**Box 2.10. Barriers to formative assessment: Insights from Norway**

In 2010 Norway introduced an Assessment for Learning programme that sought to improve assessment practice in schools by integrating the following four principles into the teaching practice. The principles state that students and apprentices learn better when they: 1) understand what to learn and what is expected of them; 2) obtain feedback that provides information on the quality of their work or performance; 3) are given advice on how to improve; and 4) are involved in their own learning process and in self-assessment.

The programme identified a number of barriers to strengthening assessment for learning in teaching practices.

**1. Teachers' resistance to change in teacher and student roles**

The successful implementation of assessment for learning practices requires changing traditional teacher and student roles. Without this change, students will not use the feedback given to them. Teachers who are used to leading their classroom in conventional ways, such as teaching students from the blackboard and doing all the talking, can feel uneasy about a potential loss of control once more power is given to students. Students can also find the change difficult. They need to learn how to use feedback and how to have a dialogue with teachers and their peers about their learning, not just their test scores.

**2. Shortcomings in teachers' subject knowledge and assessment skills**

Questions remain about the depth of subject knowledge teachers need in order to give effective feedback in their classrooms. They also need to be able to use assessment criteria and to have high levels of assessment literacy. Neither of these is particularly strong in initial teacher education in a number of education systems, Romania included.

**3. Busy classrooms and the need for sustained support**

Teachers need concrete examples of how to "do" assessment for learning, and they need tools to support their practice. Changing classroom practice is a slow process and needs sustained programmes of professional development. If teachers find themselves overwhelmed or too busy, they will not have the time or energy to use assessment for learning practices.

**Box 2.10. Barriers to formative assessment: Insights from Norway *(continued)***

**4. High-stakes testing systems and administrative requirements**

The pressures that systems of testing and high-stakes examinations impose on schools inevitably generate teaching to the test and a particular set of expectations on teachers and teaching. In such a situation, teaching is mostly centred on check-listing of test content and practising test items, and this practice is not just confined to the months before a particular test. In the face of high-stakes tests, students and their parents also expect this behaviour of teachers. Ironically, the kind of learning promoted by these practices is low-level memorisation with little higher order thinking or competency development. Preparing for tests can actually deny students the opportunities to develop the competencies for future learning and success.

*Source*: Hopfenbeck, T. et al. (2013), "Balancing trust and accountability? The Assessment for Learning Programme in Norway: A governing complex education systems case study", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 97, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpqlsnn-en.

### *A national policy statement on formative assessment*

Improving the use of formative assessment in Romania will hinge on teacher engagement. A strong national statement on why it matters for education in Romania would support this, building legitimacy and a sense of national value around formative assessment. While the 2011 Education Law does provide a place for formative assessment, it is not explicit enough about the central value and role that formative assessment should play in Romania. At the same time, the new centralised assessments, which effectively took some of the responsibility for student assessment out of the classroom, may have created an ambiguous message about the accuracy value of teachers' professional judgement which is at the heart of formative assessment.

A national statement that provides a clear definition of what formative assessment is, how it applies to classrooms and teaching practices, and most importantly the rewards that it can provide for student learning will be important to raise the value accorded to formative assessment nationally. This will need to be underpinned by a comprehensive strategy that includes developing teachers' skills in using assessment to support student learning, and reviewing the evaluation and assessment framework to create more space for formative assessment to develop.

## *Developing teachers' assessment literacy*

Assessment literacy can be understood as "an individual's understandings of the fundamental assessment concepts and procedures deemed likely to influence educational decisions" (Popham, 2011). Teachers with strong assessment literacy will have both the skills and the confidence to use assessment for learning practice in their classrooms and to reach their own decisions about student development and learning. They will also be able to engage with more sophisticated forms of summative assessment and can make informed contributions to debates about the future development of national assessments and high-stakes examinations.

In Romania, the limited availability and lack of practical preparation in initial and continuing teacher education is not limited to formative assessment, but to Romanian teachers' "assessment literacy" more broadly. Assessment is not sufficiently developed through initial teacher education, continuing professional development or in the guidance and support associated with classroom and external assessments.

### *The role of teacher education and professional development*

Encouraging greater use of formative assessment and developing teachers' overall understanding of how to use assessment in Romania will require significant efforts not just to develop teachers' capacity for assessment, but to build their understanding and appreciation of why it matters. What teachers *believe* about assessment is at least as important in shaping their practice as what they know about it. Assessment beliefs may even be more important than assessment knowledge (James and Pedder, 2006; Xu and Brown, 2016). If, as in Romania, a teacher's own educational experience as a student was dominated by tests and examinations, then it is difficult for them to develop an appreciation of alternative approaches or of the value of formative assessment.

This will mean giving far more priority to the study and practice of assessment in initial teacher education and continuing professional development. Currently, while initial teacher education does include a course on assessment and evaluation, it does not prepare teachers sufficiently in the learner-centred, inclusive approach to teaching and assessment that the new curriculum requires. Moreover, teaching preparation remains largely theoretical, and teachers have limited opportunity to develop and practise formative assessment skills (see Chapter 3).

Romania has recognised that its current initial teacher education is insufficient and is in the process of developing a new master's for teacher education. If this is successfully implemented, it will need to include more thorough preparation on assessment and opportunities to practice assessment for new teachers. As Romania develops the assessment module of its new master's it may draw on the experience of other countries. A recent project in New South Wales in Australia identified elements of initial teacher education that are particularly important for the development of teachers' assessment literacy (Box 2.11).

**Box 2.11. Learning Assessment: An initiative in New South Wales, Australia**

New South Wales recently undertook work to ensure that teachers at the beginning of their careers had the assessment literacy needed to support assessment policy and practice in classrooms. This identified 24 elements now required in all initial teacher education programmes. Some of these are particularly relevant to Romania as it begins to generate its own list of key elements to support new policy directions in assessment:

1. Beginning teachers need to understand how teaching, learning, assessment, feedback and reporting can be aligned and integrated in practice.
2. Beginning teachers need to know the purposes of summative and formative assessment and how the two can be brought together. They need to know how to incorporate both purposes for assessment into teaching and learning programmes.
3. Beginning teachers need to know and understand how syllabus outcomes are written and how they can provide a guide to the types of knowledge and skills to be learned and to a variety of appropriate assessment tasks and activities.
4. Beginning teachers should have a working knowledge of the vocabulary of assessment. They should understand and be able to apply concepts of validity and reliability to the development of their own assessment activities and tasks and to broader measures such as examinations and standardised testing programmes.
5. Beginning teachers should understand the importance of developing criteria for judging different levels of performance in response to assessment activities or tasks.

**Box 2.11. Learning Assessment: An initiative in New South Wales, Australia *(continued)***

6. Beginning teachers need to be able to formulate questions to help them analyse student performance for feedback to students and, just as importantly, to feed forward into their teaching.
7. Beginning teachers need to have practised and gained understanding of the professional skill of making judgements about student achievement against standards from evidence gained from assessment activities or tasks.
8. Beginning teachers should know about ways that the reliability of their judgements can be improved, for example through moderation.
9. Beginning teachers should be encouraged to develop a "mindset" towards assessment and its impact on learners.

*Source*: BOSTES (2016), Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards New South Wales website, www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/.

Since initial teacher education only targets new teachers, and since assessment literacy is developed throughout a teacher's career, it will also be important to integrate formative assessment strategies into continuous professional development. Financial constraints mean that the availability of in-service training is currently limited in Romania but the cost of a comprehensive programme to develop teachers' assessment skills would be easily offset by the potential gains in terms of learner retention and achievement. The experience of other countries suggests that such training needs to be offered over a sustained period of time and combine courses with school-based support if it is to have an impact on teaching practice (Hopfenbeck, et al., 2013). One way to do this is to create local "assessment advisers" who work with schools to support the adoption of formative techniques; this could be a function of the school improvement unit that this review recommends Romania establish within each CSI (see Chapter 4). The effective use of formative assessment should also be prioritised within teacher appraisal and school evaluation standards (see Chapters 3 and 4). Some countries, such as Hungary, have also launched national awareness raising campaigns with professional content on assessment (Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010). This can help to strengthen the reputation and acceptance of formative assessment, which will be important in Romania where the adoption of such practices will demand a considerable change in mindset not just among teachers but also parents, students and society at large.

As an immediate step, any continuous professional development programme introduced to implement the new curriculum should systematically include support for classroom assessment practice and focus on the areas that can provide most value for Romania. This might initially focus on developing teacher understanding of the why and how of providing feedback to students on the next stages in their learning, and creating a classroom context where students feel it is safe to make mistakes and are engaged in their own learning. The national assessments introduced by the 2011 Education Law have the potential to support these changes if they are developed further.

### *Using the national assessments to support assessment literacy*

The new national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 were introduced to diagnose student learning as the basis for a more individualised approach. However, the individualised student learning plans and student portfolios that the assessment results were supposed to feed into have not been developed. The lack of accompanying guidance or support to help teachers use the assessments means that they do not seem to be supporting development of teachers' assessment capacity. The OECD review team formed the impression on the basis of its interviews that some teachers see the assessments as an additional administrative requirement with little value for teaching and learning.

As a first step, given the diagnostic purpose of the assessments, it would make sense to move them to the beginning of the school year, so that teachers can use the results to establish students' learning levels and put in place appropriate teaching and learning plans to reflect their students' individual needs. The diagnostic purpose of the assessments would also be supported by the following elements:

### *Developing individualised learning plans and student portfolios*

The individualised learning plans and student portfolios set out in the 2011 Education Law are positive tools to encourage more student-led, differentiated learning. If they are to have their intended impact, however, additional supports will be needed. Developing a central model and template for the student learning plan could help teachers to develop and use them in their classrooms. Central guidance on how assessment results should feed into the plan, and how teachers can interpret assessment results to guide future learning, would likewise be of value. Teachers also need orientation on how they can use the plan to engage students in a conversation about their own learning goals, so that the plans can also be used to develop students' "learning to learn" competencies. Romania might learn from the practices of other countries in the use of individual learning plans (Box 2.12).

Student portfolios can encourage students to document and reflect on their learning progression. Many European countries are increasingly using student portfolios to engage students more actively in their own learning and assess a wider range of cross-cutting competencies, which traditional assessment formats do not permit.

**Box 2.12. Countries' experience of student learning plans**

Alongside specific policy frameworks to encourage greater use of formative assessment, some countries have also adopted mandatory tools to support teachers' use of formative assessment, including student learning plans:

**Sweden: Individual Development Plans**

In Sweden, the use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) is compulsory in schools. The purpose of the IDP is to ensure that teachers and students focus on identifying individual learning goals and developing strategies to address any shortcomings. The IDPs include an assessment of the student's current performance level in relation to the curriculum's learning goals and focus on the steps that a student should take to reach those goals. School leaders are required to provide the overall structure and shape for the plans, and can choose to include additional information such as a student's general development. If a student is experiencing difficulties, the school is required to develop plans as to how they will help the student to achieve their learning goals. The goals in the IDPs are used for student self-assessment, with students asked to rate their own progress and performance.

**Box 2.12. Countries' experience of student learning plans *(continued)***

**Denmark: Individual Student Plans**

In Denmark, mandatory Individual Student Plans (ISPs) were introduced in 2006 to document student learning progress. The ISPs contribute to formalising Danish assessment practice by documenting students' learning progress for dialogue with key stakeholders (Shewbridge et al., 2011). They emphasise students' future learning rather than summative learning outcomes. Official evaluations, strong support from national-level parents' organisations and student associations (see Danish Ministry of Education and Rambøll, 2011) and stakeholder feedback confirm that the ISPs are well received by parents and teachers. In short, parents appreciate a written summary of their child's progress because they feel that they are better prepared for their meeting with teachers. Teachers perceive the benefit of transferring documented information on students' achievement to subsequent teachers and as such ISPs play a crucial role in tracking individual students' developmental growth over time. Teachers recognise the role of ISPs in easing communication with parents. The added workload ISPs entail for teachers is a bone of contention, but there is a current pilot to allow educators more flexibility in determining and prioritising the content of ISPs.

*Sources*: Shewbridge et al. (2011), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Denmark 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116597-en; OECD (2013d), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

### *Introducing a more teacher-led format for the national assessments*

A more teacher-led assessment format would provide teachers with the space to exercise, and develop confidence in, their own professional judgement. Teachers would be responsible for the design of the assessment, initially in Grade 2 and then, if successful, in Grade 6. Teachers should be supported by a national item bank developed by the NCAE which could also provide details on which assessment items are suitable to assess which competencies in the curriculum. Central guidance on how to conduct the assessment will also be important. This could include a report template for reporting results to students and parents with a dedicated space for student feedback on how to improve. A sample of the reports might be externally checked for consistency. With these measures in place, teachers will be able to progressively develop their assessment capacity, so that they are able to select and develop their own assessment items to meet the individual needs of their students, enhancing the assessments' diagnostic value.

## ***Creating space for classroom-based assessment in the framework for evaluation and assessment***

Increasing the priority accorded to formative assessment through a national policy statement, improving teacher preparation and providing central assessment tools for classroom use will all help to develop teachers' assessment literacy. However teachers' beliefs will not change unless there is a policy direction away from summative external assessments and examinations, and towards the professional judgement of teachers in their own classrooms. Scaling back external testing would be a practical expression of this new direction, as would decoupling test and examination results from teacher appraisal and school evaluation.

### *Revisiting the national assessments and examinations*

External examinations in Romania continue to dominate conceptions of student assessment, leaving little space for formative assessment policy or practice. As in other countries, high visibility summative assessment is a significant barrier to the development of formative assessment practice (OECD, 2005a). While it is not unusual that external examinations like the Grade 8 and baccalaureate weigh heavily on education systems, their dominance in Romania is particularly marked.

In the immediate term, when Romania comes to revise the two examinations as part of its curriculum reform, it might review the composition of the final grades. This could mean moving to a more modular approach that includes more school-based projects. This would provide more space for feedback to students, the opportunity to assess cross-disciplinary competencies like collaboration and teamwork, and reduce the over-reliance on external pen-and-paper summative assessments. Over the medium to longer term, as discussed above, a review of the structure of schooling and reconsidering the use of the Grade 8 examination for tracking at 14 years will be central to supporting student learning and progression.

### *The evaluation and assessment framework*

The predominance of summative student assessment is reinforced by the overall framework for evaluation and assessment in Romania. Student results in national examinations play a role in determining teachers' salary bonuses. They are also part of school evaluation criteria, and successive poor examination results can result in the dismissal of a school's management team. The public discourse on education is dominated by examination results, which is reinforced by the ministry's national school rankings on the basis of examination results.

As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 in this report, these practices need to change. Teacher appraisal needs to focus on teachers' classroom practices, including formative assessment, rather than student scores in national examinations and in academic competitions. A stronger developmental appraisal is also a way to develop assessment literacy: teachers who are encouraged to reflect critically on their own pedagogical practices and development needs are likely to be better equipped to provide useful feedback to students in their classrooms, and to help students reflect critically on their own performance to encourage more self-aware learners (see Chapter 3). Moving school evaluation away from assessment and examination results to focus more on a critical reflection of school development will also be important (see Chapter 4). Ending the public ranking of schools and replacing it with a more holistic vision of a good school would also be a step towards educating parents and the wider community about what constitutes achievement in education. Across the system, assessments for ranking and selective rewards need to be reduced to make way for a stronger focus on improvement and the belief that every student, teacher and school can excel.

## Policy Issue 2.4: Strengthening central capacity for assessment

Romania's extensive system of national testing is not matched by its level of resources. Ensuring that there is the necessary capacity to develop modern testing in line with international developments is critical for the quality and reliability of high-stakes national examinations. It is also important for developing assessments and examinations that align with the new curriculum and the accompanying tools to build teachers' assessment literacy. Reducing the scale of external assessments and examinations,

through more teacher-led assessment in Grades 2 and 6, and returning to a sample-based assessment in Grade 4 will free up some capacity that could be used to focus on improving test quality.

### *Adequately resourcing the NCAE to ensure high-quality national assessments and examinations*

When the NCAE was established in 1998 it marked an important step in professionalising assessment in Romania. The NCAE has improved the reliability and quality of national examinations in recent decades and developed new assessments to support system-monitoring and school-assessment practice. However, over that period, while its responsibilities have increased significantly, it has not had a corresponding increase in investment. As result, it is now straining to administer the existing assessment and examination regime, and lacks the resources to lead improvements and keep up with international developments in assessment techniques.

Areas where investments are required include psychometricians proficient in modern test design and analysis including IRT, and research capacity for the continuous development of the examinations and assessments. It will also be important to invest in technology to support better data management and analysis. The use of technology to administer assessments and examinations could also help to reduce costs, and in the longer term make it possible to develop technology-enabled testing, such as adaptive assessments that provide more personalised testing and fine-grained information on student learning. Without these investments, it will be difficult for the NCAE to ensure the validity and reliability of national examinations, which is critical given their high stakes for students' future.

It will also be difficult to develop the existing Grade 4 assessment into a standardised tool for system-monitoring without increasing investment. Nearly all OECD and EU countries now conduct their own standardised national assessments (OECD, 2015). The absence of such a monitoring tool in Romania is a significant gap, which means that the country does not have the means to reliably monitor student outcomes from year to year against national expectations for learning, or to compare learning outcomes across different groups of students, which is essential for equity monitoring (see Chapter 5).

This chapter has also highlighted other gaps in the resources available for student assessment that limit the capacity of assessment to support teaching and learning. The NCAE will have a leading role in addressing some of these gaps, in particular, strengthening learning standards and ensuring that they are reflected in the design, marking and reporting of assessments and examinations. It will also have a leading role in developing teacher supports such as item banks and assessment reporting templates to support teachers' assessment literacy. This work is critical for the development of assessment in Romania, however at present the NCAE has no spare capacity to undertake it.

It will be important that any consideration of resources is linked to a wider review of the Centre's roles and responsibilities. This review should focus on identifying those activities that the Centre is well placed to undertake, and those which might be better conducted by other bodies or parts of the ministry. In particular, the organisation of the textbook evaluation process, which is rarely conducted by a national examination centre, might be more appropriately undertaken by another body or unit in the ministry. Relieving the Centre of such activities would allow it to focus on its core activities, such as ensuring the quality of the examinations and assessments.

This review recommends that Romania give careful consideration to the structure of secondary pathways before introducing any new examinations, such as an examination or qualification at the end of compulsory education. If Romania does proceed with reforms to examinations in secondary education, it will be important that these be adequately resourced so that any new assessment is well designed and its implementation effectively supported. The recent introduction of the new national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 took place without sufficient investment in accompanying resources, such as student learning plans, portfolios or guidance for teachers on how to use the assessments. This has limited their value and largely prevented them from serving their intended purpose as a diagnostic and formative tool for teachers and students.

### *Ensuring that the NCAE has the analytical capacity and international exposure needed to lead continuous improvement*

It is important for the quality of Romania's national examinations and assessments that the NCAE can lead their continuous improvement. A key part of this is being able to analyse how students overall, and in different groups, respond to the test items that it produces. This would give the NCAE the information it needs to continually improve the quality of its items, and to ensure test fairness by seeing how different groups of students perform across different items. Understanding how performance differs across key groups nationally will also be important for the NCAE to ensure representative student sampling for the revised Grade 4 assessment.

At present the NCAE produces an annual report following each national assessment, and, in the past, following the Grade 8 and 12 examinations. While the reports on the national assessments set out student results by item they do not break down student performance across key groups, such as by socio-economic group or gender. Partly due to the NCAE's lack of capacity, the IES has recently analysed the Grade 8 mock results. It analyses results by some contextual variables, such as regional economic development. It also included comments on the test design, such as the curriculum's competencies not being well reflected in the examination content, or that the examination should be accompanied by a student background questionnaire (IES, 2016). Such insights are important for continuous test development, making it essential that the design and administration of the national examinations and assessment remain closely related to results analysis.

Continuous development is also supported through engagement in international assessments. The IES is now responsible for leading Romania's engagement in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which means that the NCAE is no longer involved in any international large-scale assessment of student learning. While this move reflects a positive acknowledgement of the importance of using the PISA results to conduct national analysis, it is important that the NCAE continues to benefit from the learning opportunities that PISA participation provides. International assessments, and particularly an assessment like PISA that aims to assess competence, provides useful exposure to international assessment techniques. This might mean that the NCAE regularly meets with the IES to be informed about PISA's technical developments and assessment techniques, and perhaps joins the IES at international PISA meetings on the assessment's implementation.

### *Strengthening the NCAE's technical independence*

The NCAE's programme of work and decisions on assessment policy are decided by the ministry. While MNESR involvement is important, since it is ultimately responsible for education, it is also necessary to ensure that the NCAE has an independent voice so that important national decisions on assessment policy are adequately informed by specialised assessment expertise. This independence could be supported by the creation of a governing board for the NCAE, which would oversee its work and be involved in key decisions regarding its programme of work and its budget, and provide expert independent advice to government on assessment policy.

Such a board could be composed of national experts in student assessment policy and practice. This should include a representative from the IES to ensure coherence and co-ordination, and so that the board can draw on the IES's expertise and research. Including one or more international experts would help to ensure that the NCAE's work is informed by international developments and strengthen its independence from national politics.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Romania has a compelling need to reorient its student assessment towards a greater focus on teachers' professional judgement and away from external assessment. Creating space for more teacher-led assessment, especially formative assessment, and supporting teachers to interpret and use assessment results to provide high-quality feedback and differentiate their teaching will raise the quality of learning for all students. This is a significant change, not just for student assessment but also for the evaluation and assessment framework, education system, and society in general. To support this shift, parents and the public will need to be engaged in an evidence-based discussion on the role of assessment and how it can best support student learning.

### *Recommendations*

#### *2.1. Align student assessment with the learning goals of the new curriculum*

**2.1.1. Strengthen the curriculum's learning standards in the core domains of reading and writing, and mathematics so that they become the key reference for classroom and external assessment, supporting alignment with the curriculum (Figure 2.3)**. This should include providing marked examples of student work that demonstrate national expectations. Using the current scales for classroom marking to set out levels of performance within the national learning standards would also help teachers to relate the standards to their own classroom practices and establish a common language for describing performance.

**2.1.2. Use the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to reinforce the learning standards.** The national assessments focus on the new curriculum's core competencies, potentially providing a valuable means to communicate expected standards and reliably benchmark individual student performance against them. For this to happen, however, the assessments need to be accompanied by guidance on how to interpret students' work, in line with learning standards. The reporting of results also needs to be aligned with the learning standards, so that teachers, students and parents have a clear understanding of the extent to which a student has sufficiently mastered core competencies and of any potential gaps and difficulties in learning.

**2.1.3. Clarify which part of the government will be responsible for the further development of learning standards, to ensure that this work is given sufficient priority**. Whichever agency assumes responsibility, close co-operation between IES and NCAE will be essential, as will adequate funding.

### *2.2. Mitigate the negative impact of national examinations on student learning and progression*

**2.2.1. Improve the quality and fairness of the Grade 8 examination as a first priority.** The range of competencies and domains assessed should be broadened to provide a more rounded assessment of student learning and help to encourage learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Reducing the classroom-based marks that contribute to the final mark to Grades 7 and 8 will help to avoid that stakes are associated with classroom work, and focus teachers and students on learning rather than demonstrating performance, in the early years of lower secondary. The accuracy and reliability of classroom-based marks for Grades 7 and 8 should be improved through "moderation" based on teacher discussions in schools on the standard of student work and appropriate marking and an overall effort to improve teachers' assessment literacy (see Recommendation 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). As this improves, the classroom-based marks may account for a greater share of the overall Grade 8 mark.

**2.2.2. Review pathways and certification in secondary education** to ensure that all students benefit from equal education opportunities for longer and gain meaningful recognition for their achievements. This should involve a critical review of when and how students choose and are selected for different secondary school programmes, and give consideration to ending the Grade 8 examination for selection into upper secondary.

### *2.3. Develop teachers' assessment literacy*

**2.3.1. Develop a national policy statement on the value of formative assessment and why it matters for education in Romania,** underpinned by a strategy to promote its use. This could be complemented by a national awareness raising campaign to help teachers and society fully appreciate its significance for learning.

**2.3.2. Ensure that teachers' initial and continuous education provides them with a stronger basis in assessment.** The new Masters of Arts in teaching is an opportunity to ensure that initial teacher education provides new teachers with a strong grounding in the theory of assessment combined with sufficient opportunities to practice assessment, particularly formative methods. In-service training on assessment should be expanded, and professional development programmes on the new curriculum should systematically include support to help teachers assess competencies and use assessment to shape teaching and student learning. Romania could consider creating "assessment advisors" to work with schools to help them use formative assessment techniques, located in Romania's new school improvement units in the CSIs (see Recommendation 4.4.4 in Chapter 4).

**2.3.3. Make greater use of the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to develop teachers' assessment skills and improve the quality of feedback.** Giving teachers responsibility for designing the assessments will give them more space to exercise and develop confidence in their personal judgement and to give more detailed feedback to students on their performance. To enable this, teachers should be provided with central support such as a reporting template and a national item bank to ensure that they assess student learning in line with the curriculum's expectations and are able to provide useful feedback to students on how to improve.

This practice could initially be trialled in Grade 2, and later extended to Grade 6 if successful. Guidance on how to develop individual learning plans on the basis of student results would help teachers to use the assessments more effectively for formative purposes. Moving the assessments to the beginning of the school year would also reinforce their formative function.

**2.3.4 Encourage schools and teachers to focus on formative assessment by increasing the value it has in teacher appraisal and school evaluation, while reducing the weight given to the results of high-stakes examinations** in line with the measures recommended below (see Recommendations 3.4.3. and 4.2.3 in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively).

### *2.4. Strengthen central capacity for assessment*

**2.4.1. Adequately resource the NCAE.** Increase the NCAE's resources so that it can invest in psychometricians proficient in modern test design, technology for better data management, results analysis and research capacity to improve the design and quality of national examinations, and provide the support and teacher guidance to accompany the national assessments as recommended in this review (see Recommendation 3.3). Consideration of the Centre's resources should also be linked to a review of its role and responsibilities, to identify which activities it is well placed to undertake and those which might be better conducted by other bodies or parts of the Ministry, such as the textbook evaluation process.

**2.4.2. Ensure that the NCAE has the analytical capacity and international exposure to lead continuous improvement.** Making it an objective to conduct more extensive analysis of its examination and assessment results, and developing the capacity to do so, will be important to ensure the validity and reliability of national test items. Some form of continued involvement for the NCAE in international assessments would also help support ongoing modernisation in national assessment design.

**2.4.3. Strengthen the NCAE's voice as a centre of technical assessment expertise by creating a governing board.** This should be composed of national experts, including a representative from the IES to ensure coherence and co-ordination in student assessment policy, and an international expert or experts so that the NCAE's work is informed by international developments.

## Note

1. Some arts and sports schools as well as theological and military high schools ("vocational schools") continue to organise their own entrance examinations to test students' aptitude in specific skills areas (arts or sports).

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# *Chapter 3*

# Teacher appraisal in Romania: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers' professional development

*This chapter looks at how Romania evaluates teaching practice and supports teachers to improve through its teacher appraisal system. Romania uses a combination of appraisal types but their developmental function is limited, reducing support for teacher growth. Developing professional teacher standards would help to ensure that all teachers are appraised according to common criteria for effective teaching. Teachers' development would be better supported if their regular appraisals carried reduced stakes for their career and pay, and included more formative practices such as open discussion and feedback. To ensure that only motivated candidates with the right attributes enter the teaching profession, the appraisals to complete probation should enforce a minimum threshold for entry, while providing new teachers with the support they need to grow professionally. Finally, reviewing the system of linking appraisals to salary bonuses and creating differentiated career paths for teachers which fairly reward those taking on new roles and responsibilities will help to encourage teachers to develop their skills throughout their career.*

## Introduction

This chapter looks at how Romania's existing appraisal system could be reformed to strengthen its positive impact on teaching and learning and align better with the country's curriculum goals. Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance and competencies (OECD, 2013c). Well-designed appraisal supports teachers in their professional development and holds them to account for their practice, helping to improve teaching, and in turn, raise student achievement.

Romania uses a number of different appraisal practices, including regular annual appraisals and appraisals to determine whether teachers should be fully certified, advance to a higher qualification level or receive a salary bonus. Romania does not, however, use teacher appraisal as a developmental tool. Appraisal processes are summative rather than formative, and have high-stakes consequences for teachers' remuneration and careers. This limits the potential of the appraisals to positively influence teaching practices and enhance student outcomes.

If teaching practice in Romania is to become more student-focused and adapted to different learner needs, teachers will need a more developmental regular appraisal process, involving constructive feedback and encouraging them to participate in professional learning opportunities that encourage new approaches. This is particularly important for new teachers, who require more support in their first year of employment and currently receive limited initial preparation in areas essential for activating student learning, such as formative assessment. At the same time, Romania's summative appraisals of teachers, which provide a level of quality assurance on entry to the profession and for career progression, should be revised to encourage and reward the development of important pedagogical and professional competencies. Common professional teaching standards would give teachers, and all actors involved in their certification, appraisal, initial education and ongoing learning a clear, consistent model of good teaching to drive improvement in practice and outcomes.

## Context and main features of teacher appraisal in Romania

### *The teaching profession*

#### *Initial teacher education*

As in most OECD countries, in Romania, the minimum academic qualification to become a primary teacher is a bachelor's degree and the minimum qualification to become an upper secondary teacher is a master's degree (OECD, 2014a). However, initial teacher education in Romania provides considerably less preparation in the core aspects of teaching than in other countries. Teachers in Romania undertake the following initial training education, followed by a one-year probation period, to obtain permanent teacher certification:

- for primary teachers: a bachelor's degree in education (three years)
- for lower secondary teachers: a one-semester module of initial teacher education while obtaining a bachelor's degree in a subject other than education
- for upper secondary teachers: two modules of initial teacher education lasting one academic year while obtaining a bachelor's degree and a master's degree (two years) in a subject other than education (MNESR, 2012a).

The majority of Romania's universities (83) offer some form of initial teacher education. There is considerable variation in the quality of programmes across institutions

(European Commission, 2015a; Stingu et al., 2016). All providers and their programmes must be accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), which is intended to ensure that minimum standards are met. However, the accreditation standards are broad and do not specify what is needed for a high-quality teacher preparation programme (MNESR, 2006).

There are concerns in Romania, as in many other European countries, that low entry requirements combined with low salaries have made teaching a less attractive profession. The admission criteria for bachelor's education programmes for future primary teachers are the same as those for other bachelor's degree programmes and there are no minimum admission requirements for the initial teacher education modules for future secondary teachers. Candidates are interviewed for entry, but all those who apply tend to be admitted (Velea and Istrate, 2011). This has resulted in a surplus of students training to teach as a second-choice career.

Initial teacher education modules offer less preparation than programmes in other European countries, especially in practical domains. Future primary and lower secondary teachers receive just one semester of professional coursework in didactics and pedagogy, which is roughly half of what candidate teachers receive on average across Europe (MNESR, 2012b; European Commission, 2015b). They also have less teaching practice, (78 hours), than in all but one other European country, and significantly less than in countries such as the United Kingdom where teachers have up to 1065 hours and Lithuania where teachers receive up to 800 hours (European Commission, 2013). Future upper secondary teachers receive an academic year of professional coursework, similar to many other European countries, but still only have a limited amount of teaching practice: 120 hours compared with up to 1 065 hours in other European countries as indicated above (European Commission, 2013). Evidence suggests that the modules are theory-focused, offer limited preparation in modern teaching and assessment techniques, and do not adequately cover important topics like teaching at-risk students and integrating Roma children and students with special education needs (Stark and Zoller, 2014; European Commission, 2015a).

Romania has recognised that its initial teacher education is in need of reform. The Teaching Staff Statute that formed part of the 2011 Education Law upgraded the qualifications required to become a teacher to a new two-year Master of Arts programme in teaching. However, this has not yet been put in place for a number of reasons, including resistance among some universities, a lack of readiness to implement the programme and disagreement over whether the programme should be at the post-graduate level. The government plans to introduce the programme by 2020 (Government of Romania, 2016).

### *Professional development*

Continuing professional development is both a right and an obligation for teachers in Romania. Teachers must accumulate 90 continuing professional development credits (approximately 240 hours) every 5 years (Petrovici, 2009). A 15-member commission within the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR) accredits continuing professional development providers for four-year periods. The Teachers' Training Houses affiliated to the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) deliver the majority of courses. Other providers include universities, which provide courses to teachers seeking career advancement, central government bodies like the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

On average, Romania's lower secondary teachers undertake more days of continuing professional development (24) and are exposed to more topics (7) than the European average (10 days and 5 topics) (OECD 2014c in European Commission, 2015b). However, teachers bear the cost of most of their continuing professional development, and they have more incentive to participate in the accredited courses that allow them to accumulate credits for career progression and job security than those that might meet their own professional learning needs (Zoller, 2015). Their appraisals are not used to identify professional development to address areas where growth is needed. Teacher peer networks exist within and across schools, but these are reportedly competitive rather than supportive learning environments.

Romania's plan to provide mentors to all beginning teachers and the government's announcement of a virtual library for teachers are positive developments. However, a shortage of national funds and dependence on external financing from the European Union (EU) and NGOs have made it difficult to develop a systematic approach to continuing professional development, offering both formal and informal, job-embedded learning opportunities.

### *Teacher remuneration*

As discussed in Chapter 1, teachers in Romania have one of the lowest minimum starting salaries as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita across Europe (European Commission, 2015b). Teachers' salary scales are set nationally; teaching position, initial training level, professional degree and seniority all affect remuneration (UNESCO, 2011). Salaries have been increasing: by 5% in March and September of 2015, and by 15% in December of the same year (Eurydice, 2015, 2016), and a 15% increase for the education sector came into effect in January 2017 (SeeNews, 2016). However, the starting salary remains too low to be competitive and progression along the scale is slow (see Chapter 1).

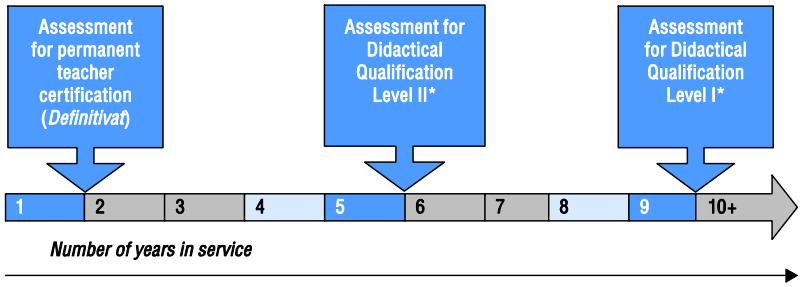
Since 1997, Romania has had a "merit grade" salary bonus scheme for teachers (Eurydice, 2007). Under the current scheme, up to 16% of teachers, principals and CSI inspectors in each county who have at least four years of experience and successfully pass a merit grade assessment receive a five-year bonus of 25% on top of their basic salary (MNESR, 2011b). Romania also offers financial allowances to teachers for working in remote areas, working with students with special education needs, and for acting as form teachers or tutors (Eurydice, 2016).

### *Teachers' career structures*

Romania has a long-standing three-stage teacher career path based on seniority and the passing of formal assessments (Figure 3.1). The stages are:

- the beginning teacher role, which generally lasts one year and ends with the exam for permanent teacher certification (the *definitivat*)
- the Didactical Qualification Level II, for which teachers can apply four years after passing their *definitivat* exam (or three years, if they received high marks on their appraisal for completion of probation)
- the Didactical Qualification Level I, for which teachers can apply four years after obtaining Level II (or three years, if they received high marks on their Level II appraisal).

**Figure 3.1. Assessments for New Teachers and Career Progression in Romania**




*Teachers with high marks on the preceding appraisal can be assessed for this level a year earlier.

Teachers can reach the highest didactical qualification level in less than 10 years of employment. The majority of teachers attempt to reach these levels, which result in a higher salary for the same teaching position (Stark and Zoller, 2014). This is intended to recognise good teaching, but it may be viewed more as an essential salary supplement to compensate low remuneration, particularly since higher levels on the career path are not associated with additional responsibilities requiring greater levels of competence.

Teachers can compete for "professor emeritus" status 15 years after earning their last didactic degree. This status grants teachers certain benefits, including an annual salary bonus and priority in job competitions and transfers to other schools (MNESR, 2011a). The ministry limits the number of teachers who can obtain this level, and it is not generally considered a part of the career path (MNESR, 2011a). Teachers may also hold positions within the school such as class master or the head of a subject area or department. Beyond the classroom, teachers with Level II qualifications can compete for positions as a school principal or inspector with the CSI or the MNESR (the specific prerequisites for these roles are described in Chapter 4). Teachers self-select to compete for these positions. While leadership appears to be distributed across different teacher commissions in schools, there is no succession planning-process to identify potential candidates for leadership roles.

### *Private tutoring and academic competitions*

Romania's education system is highly competitive, which affects teachers' work. Students compete to enter upper secondary high schools and tertiary institutions. This puts pressure on teachers to "teach to the test"– to focus on preparing students for the high-stakes Grade 8 and Grade 12 baccalaureate examinations that will determine their academic future. Tutoring is prevalent, especially at the secondary level. This "parallel schooling" has its roots in the 1970s and 1980s when there was a push for increasingly high academic attainment levels combined with a reduction in enrolment quotas at the upper secondary and tertiary levels, and very low teacher salaries (Eurydice, 2007). With teachers' salaries still low, tutoring is a source of supplementary income for many.

The success of teachers and schools is determined, to a large extent, by the achievements of high performers. One reason cited for the turnover of teachers in rural schools is that "a self-respecting teacher wants to work with children who can achieve good results – to send them to Olympiads" (Duminică and Ivasiuc, 2010). The merit grade salary bonus scheme rewards teachers, among other things, for preparing students for, and winning academic Olympiads (MNESR, 2016b). A criterion for the annual teacher appraisal is "promoting the school's image in the community through students'

performance in contests and competitions" (MNESR, 2011b). This narrow focus on top performers creates a risk that lower performing students will receive less attention.

### *Teachers' unions*

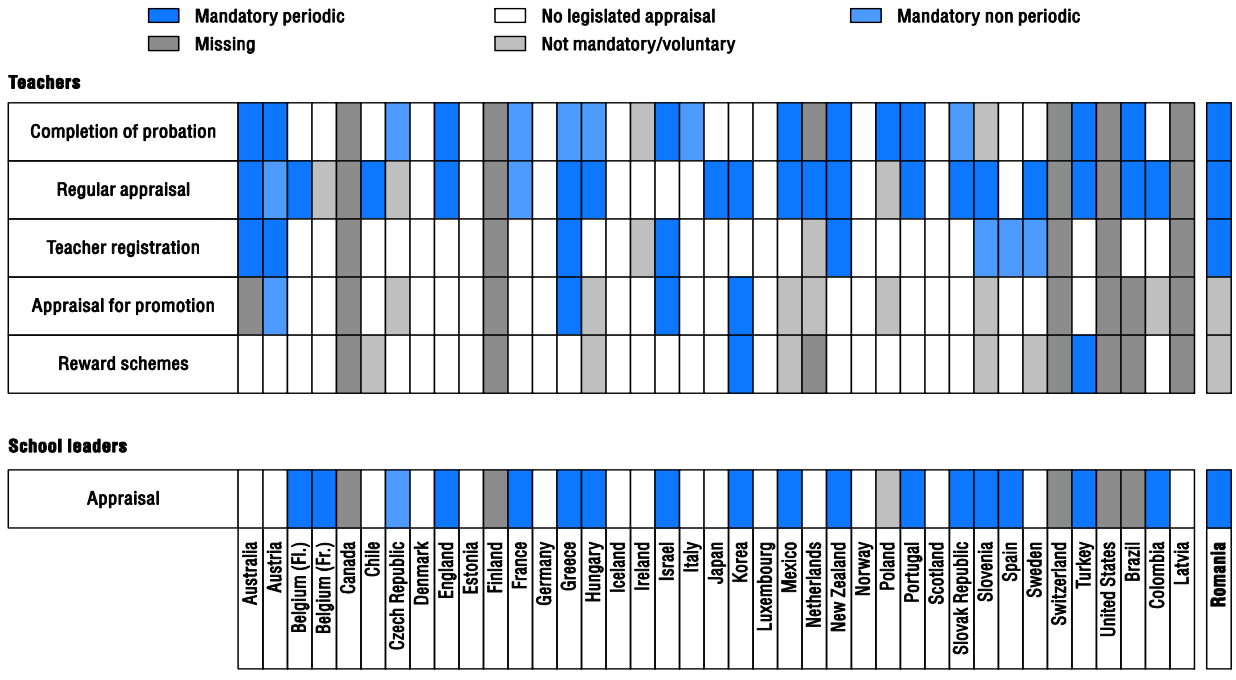
Romania established teachers' unions in 1991 (OECD, 2003). Today, the three primary unions are the Free Trade Union Federation in Education, the National Federation "Alma Mater" and the Federation of Unions in Education "Spiru Haret". The former is the largest trade union in Romania, representing 178 000 members or 63% of staff in Romania's schools (FSLI, 2016). The unions consult with the government on financial and human resource policies, broader education reform policies and draft legislation. They reportedly have significant influence given the size of their membership.

The unions are not involved in the direct appraisal of teachers, but provide input on appraisal policies. The ministry must consult with unions on the methodology and criteria for the merit grade salary bonus, according to the 2011 Education Law. Union representatives in each school's Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation, which is responsible for school self-evaluation, verify that the school is conducting regular staff evaluations as part of their responsibility (see Chapter 4). The unions are also involved in developing and providing professional development to teachers through a number of different EU-funded projects.

## *Teacher appraisal*

Teacher appraisal in Romania is characterised by a significant number of summative assessments and tests. Across the OECD and its partner countries, only one other country has as many types of legislated teacher appraisal as Romania (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2. Teacher and school leader appraisals covered by policy frameworks**




*Source*: Adapted from OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.

In Romania, there are four major teacher appraisal processes (Table 3.1):

- appraisal for completion of probation and registration
- appraisal for career advancement
- appraisal for rewards
- regular performance appraisal.

The majority of these appraisals involve external evaluators and affect teachers' certification status, salary and career progression. Teachers must also pass exams in order to find permanent teaching jobs and progress on their career path.

**Table 3.1. Teacher appraisal in Romania**

| Appraisers | Appraisees | Procedures | Consequences |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Appraisalforcompletionofprobationandregistration(mandatory)** | | | |
| CSIinspectors Writtenexamdevelopedby NationalCentre for Assessmentand Examinations(NCAE) | Beginningteachersin1st yearofemployment | • StageI:twospecialtyinspectionsbyCSI inspector; review of teacher's portfolio.<br>• StageII: *definitivat* writtenexam(subject knowledge,applieddid actic /pedagogy)hel dby theministryonceayear .<br>Beginning teachers must also receive a "good" mark intheirregularannualappraisal. | Teacherswith8/10averageon eachpartobtainpermanent teachercertification. Teacherswhofailtheexamcan takeittwicemoreandmust completeonemoreyearof probation. |
| **Appraisalforcareeradvancement** | | | |
| CSIinspectors;university facultymembers | Teacherswhopassedthe *definitivat* examfouryears before(threeyearsiftheir markswerehigh) | ForDidacticQualificationLevelII:<br>• SpecialtyinspectionbyCSIinspectorprecededby atleasttwoinspectionsinthelastfouryears .<br>• Written test on the teacher's subject and subject methodology,andanoraltestonpedagogy .<br>Testfollowsparticipationina90 -creditcontinuing professional developmentcourse. | Teacherswhoobtainatleast 8/10oneachelementattain levelsIIorI. Levelsresultinsalaryincrease, greaterjobsecurityandeligibility tocompeteforapositionasa principalorCSIinspector. Teacherswhodonotpassthe exammayretakeitwithintwo years. |
| | Teacherswhoobtained theirLevelIIqualification fouryearsbefore(three yearsiftheirmarkswere high) | ForDidacticQualificationLevelI:<br>• SpecialtyinspectionbyCSIinspectorprecededby atleasttwoinspections inthelastfouryears .<br>• Preliminary exam on teacher's subject<br>• Dissertation,supervisedbyauniversitymentor, anddefenceofdissertation . | |
| **Appraisalforrewards** | | | |
| Teachers(self -assessment); the Teachers' Council; and CSIinspectors | Allteacherswithat least fouryearsofexperience | • Teachercompilesfilewithannualappraisal results,self -assessment,activityreportand supportingdocumentation.<br>• The school's teachers' council reviews the file and providesanassessment.<br>• ACSIinspectorassessesthefil e,ranksapplicants andgrantsawards. | TheCSIawards16%ofeligible teachers,principalsandCSI inspectorsineachcountyafive -yearbonusof25%abovetheir basicsalary. |
| **Regularannualappraisal(mandatory)** | | | |
| Teachers(self -assessment); methodical commissionsand theschoolboard | Allteachers | • Teachercompletesself -evaluationbasedonset criteriaandtheirjobdescription.Developsreport supportingself -evaluation.<br>• The school's methodical commissions review the self-evaluationandscorethe teacher.<br>• Theschoolboardreviewstheself -evaluationand providesascoreandafinalgrade. | Teachersreceivemarks:very good,good,satisfactoryor unsatisfactory. Highmarksmeanteachersare eligibletocompetefor salary bonusandcareeradvancement. |

*Source*: MNESR (2011a), "Legea educaţiei naţionale" [Law of National Education], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest; MNESR (2011b), "Ordin Nr. 6143 din 1 noiembrie 2011 privind aprobarea Metodologiei de evaluare anuală a activităţii personalului didactic şi didactic auxiliar" [Order of the Minister 6143/2011, Methodology for the Annual Appraisal of Teaching and Auxiliary Teaching Staff]; MNESR (2011c), "Ordin nr. 5561 din 7 octombrie 2011 pentru aprobarea Metodologiei privind formarea continuă a personalului din învăţământul preuniversitar" [Order of the Minister 5561/2011 Methodology of Continuing Professional Development for Teachers in Pre-university Education]; Stark, G. and K. Zoller (2014), "Initial and continuous teacher education systems. National report – Romania"; G. Pusztai and A. Engler (eds.), Teacher Education Case Studies in Comparative Perspective, Center for Higher Education and Research, Debrecen, http://real.mtak.hu/15409/1/volume_teacher_education.pdf.

The regular appraisal of teachers in Romania is not as developmental as in many other countries (OECD, 2015). This appraisal has high-stakes consequences, determining teachers' eligibility for career advancement and salary bonuses, and does not inform their professional development activities. Student results on national examinations, standardised assessments and academic competitions are also factored into teacher appraisals. This is a contentious practice internationally that can reinforce inequities by disadvantaging teachers who work in challenging school contexts.

### *National framework and reference standards*

The 2011 Teaching Staff Statute sets out the appraisal process and minister's orders describe their methodologies. However, Romania does not have professional teaching standards describing what teachers should know and be able to do to provide a common basis for teacher appraisal. Each teacher appraisal process uses different evaluation criteria, and other assessment material like job descriptions and tests. By contrast, 75% OECD member and partner countries use standards to guide their appraisal processes (OECD, 2015). Standards are key to helping teachers, appraisers and all those involved in the education system to understand the fundamental, multidimensional aspects of the teaching role. Their absence in Romania is a significant gap.

### *Mandatory appraisal for completion of probation and registration*

Romania has a two-stage assessment process for permanent teacher certification that culminates in the *definitivat* exam. Teachers in Romania who receive just below a passing grade on the *definitivat* exam (five to seven) can be employed in schools as substitute teachers without permanent certification under temporary one-year contracts. Romania had a larger share of lower secondary teachers employed on contracts of one year or less (25%) than in any other country taking part in the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), against an average of 11.9% (OECD, 2014c). This raises questions about how effectively the exam is serving as a quality assurance measure to regulate entry to the profession.

The appraisals for the completion of probation and registration are summative assessments. There is no formative assessment specifically to support new teachers' development during their probation period. Beginning teachers are assessed as part of the regular school-based appraisal process, which is mandatory for all teachers and is not used to identify professional learning opportunities that would support teachers' professional growth.

Once teachers receive permanent teacher certification, they are required to take another exam – the *titularizare* or tenure exam – in order to obtain a permanent position in a school. This exam is developed by NCAE and administered by the CSIs, which hire all new teachers into schools. Teachers must receive a score of at least five out of ten for positions of four years or less and seven out of ten for positions of more than four years. They may also be subject to an inspection by a CSI inspector if some time has elapsed since they were appraised for permanent teacher certification. Passing the *titularizare* exam grants teachers priority status to fill vacancies at other schools, and ensures that their home positions are reserved for them if they transfer or take on leadership positions on a temporary basis.

### *Appraisal for career advancement*

Universities are heavily involved in Romania's voluntary appraisal for career advancement. They deliver the 90-credit continuing professional development course teachers are required to complete, write the tests for teachers based on topics approved by the MNESR, mark these tests and assess teachers' defence of their dissertations.

This kind of testing for career advancement is uncommon internationally. Of the 11 OECD and partner countries with appraisal for promotion, only Mexico and Colombia use tests. Mexico's test accounts for a very small portion (5%) of the overall appraisal (Santiago et al., 2012a; OECD, 2015). It is much more common for OECD countries to base their decisions about promotion on assessments relating to teachers' work in the classroom, including classroom observations, assessments of teachers' portfolios, self-appraisals and interviews or professional dialogue with teachers (OECD, 2015).

### *Appraisal for rewards*

OECD research suggests that countries with low teacher remuneration, like Romania, may gain some benefit from implementing performance-based pay schemes for teachers (OECD, 2012). However, such schemes are very difficult to implement fairly and equitably. A system that rewards the highest-ranked individual teachers, such as Romania's merit grade assessment process, can put teachers who work in challenging school contexts at a disadvantage, and may also encourage competition rather than collaboration among teachers (OECD, 2009).

In Romania, teachers are ranked based on assessment criteria that include inputs (e.g. developing innovative teaching material, participating in professional development or extracurricular activities) and outputs (e.g. student achievement on national examinations and academic competitions). A new minister's order was issued in December 2016, which reflects a positive development by adding assessment criteria that relate to working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with special education needs and students at risk of early school leaving. However it is not yet clear whether teachers will continue to gain the most points from having high-achieving students.

Of the few OECD and partner countries that conduct teacher appraisals for reward, only Turkey, Mexico and some parts of the United States use student outcomes to reward individual teachers (OECD, 2015). Using student results for teacher appraisal risks compensating or penalising teachers for factors beyond their control. It influences teaching practices, by encouraging teachers to focus narrowly on subjects covered in high-stakes assessments. The OECD recommends that countries take careful steps to mitigate the unintended effects of this practice (OECD, 2013a). In some states in the United States, for example, teachers and principals work together within their schools to establish student progress goals, instead of using raw examination results as part of the appraisal process (OECD, 2013a).

### *Regular appraisal*

In the majority of OECD countries, regular teacher appraisal processes aim to give teachers an opportunity to receive feedback on their professional practice, consolidate their strengths and identify areas where growth is needed (OECD, 2015). In Romania, regular appraisal is not part of a formative process of feedback and reflection on professional practice, and the outcomes are not connected to continuing professional development in any systematic way. Instead, the results of the annual appraisal process

have high-stakes consequences for teachers' salary and career opportunities. This reduces the likelihood that teachers will treat regular appraisal as a developmental opportunity. In addition, there is no standard remedial procedure to ensure that teachers in Romania who are underperforming participate in the professional development they need.

### *Other assessments of teachers*

The CSIs conduct ongoing monitoring of schools in their region, and intervene to work with school staff if there are concerns about the quality of education at a school. These interventions seem to be influenced primarily by students' results on national assessments and examinations, and the ministry's related ranking of schools. These efforts may reinforce teachers' focus on summative tests, and contribute to a perception of the CSIs as controlling rather than supportive bodies.

The CSIs and the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate in the MNESR conduct brief, one-day thematic inspections of teaching activities in different schools on an annual basis, and evaluate the quality of teaching as part of their periodic general inspections of schools. Romania's independent school evaluation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), also looks at teaching quality when conducting external evaluations of schools for accreditation or periodic evaluation once every five years (see Chapter 4).

### *Responsibilities for teacher appraisal*

All of Romania's teacher appraisal processes involve at least some evaluators who are external to the school. Regular teacher appraisal is conducted by methodical commissions within the school and the school board, whose members includes parents and local council representatives. Involving external actors can inhibit the developmental function of appraisal, which relies on an open and honest assessment of teachers' strengths, weaknesses and learning needs (OECD, 2013a). External evaluators are more appropriate for summative appraisals that require teachers to prove that they are competent.

Research recommends that appraisers receive appropriate training for their role, and that principals are responsible for the overall management of teacher appraisal and school development given the way they interconnect (OECD, 2013a). In Romania, CSI inspectors and principals are required to undertake pre-service educational management courses. These focus primarily on administration, while those topics relevant to teacher appraisal (e.g. professional development and career management, classroom management, and adult psycho-pedagogy) are only covered as optional content (Petrovici, 2009). This preparation aligns with principals' main responsibilities within Romania's schools, which are geared towards administration rather than pedagogical leadership, limiting the role they play in teacher appraisal and school development (see Chapter 4). Other evaluators who are internal to the school, and members of the school board, receive no training on teacher appraisal.

## Policy issues

Romania is moving towards a more learner-centred, competency-focused school curriculum, and is making efforts to address the skill deficits and inequities in educational outcomes revealed by recent national and international student assessments (World Bank, 2014). Teacher appraisal could be used to support the changes to teaching practice that

this will require but, to be effective, appraisal will need to focus on developing teachers' competencies rather than testing their knowledge.

This can be achieved first by developing professional teaching standards to provide a common vision of what teachers should know and be able to do, as the basis for more developmental appraisal. Standards can also support a teaching career structure that is based on teaching excellence. Second, it will be important to make the regular appraisals more developmental. The appraisals should be run entirely within the school, based on observations of teachers' interactions with students in the classroom, and connecting teachers to professional learning opportunities that address areas of weakness. This type of formative appraisal is particularly important for new teachers, who require close monitoring and support during their probation year especially as in Romania they do not have the benefit of intensive initial preparation.

A greater focus on development will also require a change in how these appraisals are used to inform decisions about career progression. Instead of appraisal scores determining teachers' eligibility for advancement, it will be important for qualitative input from principals and other in-school appraisers' to be taken into consideration when these decisions are being made. This will help to root appraisals for career advancement in the actual work that teachers do, rather than their performance on tests or other academic requirements. It would be best for these summative appraisals to be conducted by external evaluators who have the training and support to conduct consistent and reliable assessments of teachers' competency across the country. Recent changes to the merit grade appraisal are positive, by acknowledging teachers' work with struggling students and in a range of different types of schools. However further revisions are important since the process still risks distorting teachers' professional practices, by rewarding teachers for having students that achieve high marks in examinations.

## Policy Issue 3.1: Developing common professional teaching standards

Clear professional standards for teachers are essential for effective appraisal. They provide a national definition of what good teaching is so that all teachers are assessed according to a common set of qualities. As Romania does not have such standards, the default practice has been to rely on a narrow concept of effective teaching focused on good examination results. Standards clarify what good teaching means, and help to orient appraisal and all teaching policies towards the more student-led, individualised teaching practices that are central to the new curriculum, and effective teaching practices more generally.

### *Setting standards that reflect Romania's learning goals*

Professional teaching standards generally cover teachers' knowledge, pedagogy and values (Pont, 2013). Standards should be based on student learning objectives to help teachers focus on the outcomes the education system is working to achieve (OECD, 2005). They also need to accurately reflect the different tasks expected of teachers inside and outside the classroom, including their contribution to their schools, profession and their own learning (OECD, 2005). Romania will need to ensure that its professional teaching standards describe what teachers need to know and be able to do to support students' attainment of the learning objectives in the country's new curriculum, and address the different dimensions of a teacher's role.

Romania will also need to ensure that the standards are sufficiently detailed and specific in stating what competencies are expected of teachers at different stages of their career to effectively guide a revised appraisal system and support new teaching career paths (see Policy Issue 3.3). Danielson provides a model that incorporates all of these features (OECD, 2013a; Box 3.1). It has been used to develop teaching standards and appraisal criteria in several US school districts, and in Canada, Chile, England (United Kingdom) and Quebec (Canada).

**Box 3.1. Danielson's Framework for Teaching**

Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* groups teaching into four domains and their related components:

- **Planning and preparation:** demonstrating knowledge of content, pedagogy, and students; selecting instructional goals; designing coherent instruction; assessing student learning.
- **The classroom environment:** creating an environment of respect and rapport; establishing a culture of learning; managing classroom procedures and student behaviour; organising physical space.
- **Instruction:** communicating clearly and accurately; using questioning and discussion techniques; engaging students in learning; providing feedback to students; demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.
- **Professional responsibilities:** reflecting on teaching; maintaining accurate records; communicating with families; contributing to the school and district; growing and developing professionally; showing professionalism.

The components break down further into elements to be evaluated, which are accompanied by a brief description of what the performance of each element looks like according to a four-point scale that can be equated to different levels on a career path: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient and distinguished. For example *component*: creating an environment of respect and rapport, *element:* teacher interaction with students then this would be:

- **Unsatisfactory:** interaction with at least some students is negative or inappropriate to the age or culture of the students; students exhibit disrespect for the teacher.
- **Basic:** interaction is generally appropriate but may reflect inconsistencies, favouritism or disregard for students' cultures; students exhibit minimal respect for the teacher.
- **Proficient:** interactions are friendly, demonstrating warmth, caring and respect, and appropriate to developmental and cultural norms; students exhibit respect for the teacher.
- **Distinguished:** the teacher demonstrates genuine caring and respect for individual students, and students respect the teacher as an individual.

*Sources*: Danielson, C. and T. McGreal (2000), *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Alexandria; OECD (2013a), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Reviews for Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

### *Establishing a consultative forum to develop teaching standards and related reforms*

In the early 2000s, Romania worked on a roadmap for the development of teaching standards with an advisor from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the United States (Gliga, 2002). Encouragingly, this process was informed by research and involved consultations with teachers. However, the contents of the standards were never finalised as the stakeholders could not reach agreement. To develop standards this time, it will be important for Romania to ensure that the process is well co-ordinated and more deeply consultative.

One way to do this would be for Romania to establish a consultative forum to develop the standards. This would be similar to the Education Partnership Table that Ontario, Canada established to develop major education policies (Box 3.2). This forum should clearly engage teachers across the country, teachers' unions, and organisations responsible for teachers' initial and continuing education. Stakeholders who appraise and support teachers and inspect teaching quality such as school leaders, CSIs and ARACIP, will also need to be involved. The ministry might consider involving a neutral facilitator to lead the consultations. Seeking high-level agreement, rather than on the specific language of the standards, may help to ensure progress.

**Box 3.2. Stakeholder consultation on education policies in Ontario, Canada**

In 2004, a new government in Ontario, Canada, established an Education Partnership Table as an ongoing forum to gather insight from stakeholders on the development of new policies to reform the province's education system. Stakeholders were expected to solve problems, and to go beyond "simply stat[ing] predetermined positions…to explain underlying wants and needs behind positions and bring facts to bear that allow others to appreciate their viewpoint". It began with the government releasing a discussion paper describing the purpose of the table and proposing commitments to which the Minister of Education and table members would be expected to adhere. For example:

- The Minister of Education committed to: bringing major policies forward for discussion early in the policy development process; and taking input into account and providing feedback when possible.
- Table members were asked to commit to: providing their own perspective and gathering views from their members; contributing to consensus building; and presenting problems as challenges for the table to examine and help solve.

Discussions at meetings were private and centred around brief draft papers on proposed policies developed by policy makers within the ministry; papers were only finalised after input was gathered from members. The Ministry and Table members were expected to work together between meetings to develop solutions. This led to the establishment of working tables dedicated to particular topics, including a working table on teacher development. Over the course of two years, discussions at this working table informed the development of a number of policies, including changes to teacher appraisal processes and continuing professional development practices.

*Source*: Ontario Ministry of Education (2004), "Creating an Education Partnership Table", Ontario Ministry of Education website, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/creating.html.

### *Creating a national self-regulatory body to further professionalise the teaching role*

The development of teaching standards is not only a means to align teachers' certification, appraisal and initial and ongoing learning. It is also key to further professionalising the teaching role and boosting the prestige and attractiveness of the profession. Only 35% of teachers in Romania reported feeling that their profession is valued by society in the TALIS 2013 survey (OECD, 2014c). While this is just above the average of all the countries participating in TALIS, it is far below countries such as Finland, Korea and Singapore where students' learning levels are high compared to their peers internationally (OECD, 2016). Well over the majority of teachers feel that their profession is valued by society in Singapore (68%), Korea (67%) and Finland (59%) (OECD, 2014c).

Several countries have professional self-regulatory bodies for teachers which are responsible for developing and maintaining teaching standards, and the requirements for teachers' certification and training. Examples include New Zealand's Education Council, and the General Teaching Councils in England and Scotland (United Kingdom). These bodies are also intended to ensure teachers' autonomy and accountability, similar to organisations for professions like medicine or law (OECD, 2005). In some countries, they coexist alongside strong teachers' unions. The unions provide a voice for teachers with respect to their working conditions and salaries, while the self-regulatory body manages certification, and promotes and maintains high standards of professionalism. In the medium to long term, Romania could consider establishing a similar national self-regulatory body for teachers to give a stronger professional identity to the teaching workforce, both internally and within Romanian society at large.

## Policy Issue 3.2: Making the regular appraisal of teachers more developmental to support improvements to teaching

Romania's regular teacher appraisal process is closely connected to high-stakes consequences, and provides little support for teachers' ongoing professional development. The close connection between regular appraisals and salary bonuses and career progression puts pressure on teachers to demonstrate achievements rather than to treat appraisal as a learning opportunity. This also puts pressure on appraisers, who may be unwilling to negatively impact teachers by giving them anything other than the highest marks. It was indicated to the OECD review team during interviews that the majority of teachers in Romania receive high marks on their appraisals.

Changing the nature of regular appraisals so they can be a genuine learning opportunity for teachers will require revising the relationship between regular appraisals and their high-stakes consequences, the role of appraisers, and the appraisal methodology. To be most effective, appraisals should be conducted internally by school staff on a regular basis and focus on providing teachers with constructive feedback about their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying professional development opportunities that will support their continuous improvement (OECD, 2013b).

### *Revising the methodology of the regular appraisal process and building appraisers' capacity*

The close relationship between regular appraisal results and high-stakes consequences for teachers' careers and pay prevents regular appraisals from effectively supporting teacher development in Romania. In addition, appraisers are not well placed to provide

constructive feedback to support teachers' development. The lack of classroom observations and professional dialogue in the appraisal process means that appraisals are not grounded in evidence of teachers' interactions with students and nor do they involve discussions to promote improvements to teaching practice. Proper guidance and support for appraisers on the latter elements will be essential.

### *Adjusting the relationship between regular appraisals and high-stakes consequences*

Teachers in Romania need to gain particular marks in their regular appraisals to be eligible for assessments for salary bonuses or career progression and job competitions. For instance they require:

- very good (the highest mark) every year for four years to be eligible for a merit grade assessment for a salary bonus or to compete for a management position within the CSI
- good in the previous two years to be eligible to take the exam for the Level II qualification
- very good in the previous two years to be eligible to take the exam for the Level I qualification
- very good in the previous year to compete for a position as a school leader (MNESR 2011a, 2011c, 2016b; Eurydice, 2012).

This close connection to high-stakes consequences limits the ability of regular appraisals to act as a developmental tool because the effectiveness of this type of appraisal relies on teachers feeling comfortable sharing their weaknesses (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). This is less likely to occur if they are concerned about how the appraisals will affect their career opportunities or salary.

To create more space for constructive and honest feedback, it is important for Romania to change how regular appraisal results are used in decisions for teachers' career progression. Instead of requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals to be eligible for career advancement, Romania could instead require that teachers meet a minimum threshold. This would create more space for feedback on areas for development and improvement, while still ensuring that those who obtain a low mark face appropriate consequences, including participating in appropriate professional development (see below).

In addition, rather than focusing exclusively on the marks resulting from the regular appraisal process, Romania could engage school-based appraisers more systematically in the appraisals for career progression. These appraisers are in a position to provide important information about a teacher's performance, which needs to be captured through broader channels than the annual grade. In Estonia, for example, input from school-level appraisers is among the factors that may be taken into account in appraisals for career advancement (Santiago et al., 2016).

This report recommends that Romania revises and considers discontinuing its merit grade salary bonus in favour of establishing a differentiated career path for teachers, connected to higher remuneration (see Policy Issue 3.4). As a result, regular appraisal results would no longer be connected to salary bonuses.

### *Revising roles and responsibilities for appraisal*

An effective, formative regular appraisal process needs to be conducted by appropriate appraisers. Internationally, individuals within the school generally conduct developmental appraisals because they are more familiar with the teacher and their school context, and are best placed to provide ongoing feedback (Santiago and Benavides, 2009). Romania will need to address the involvement of the school board as an appraising body, the lack of opportunities for one-on-one appraisals, and the limited role played by the principal if its regular appraisals are to become more developmental.

Currently, teachers in Romania receive a final appraisal mark from their school board. This is problematic because the school board is a partially external body, including parents and local community representatives. They lack the knowledge and expertise to play an appraisal role and may not be familiar with the teacher's work (MNESR, 2016a). Teachers are expected to attend the school board meeting where their final evaluation grade is decided and argue in support of their self-evaluation results at the request of the board (MNESR, 2011b). This creates a situation in which teachers are more likely to try to demonstrate that they can perform well than use the appraisal process to honestly assess their growth needs. Instead of directly appraising teachers, a more appropriate role for the school board would be to ensure that school staff are complying with the legislated requirements of the appraisal system. They might also determine how to make the appraisal process more relevant to their school, for example by supplementing common professional teaching standards with other appraisal criteria that are particularly important to their context.

Romania's regular appraisal process also means teachers are assessed by groups (the methodical commissions and the school board). This is not a good setting for open feedback. It is important for teachers to have opportunities to discuss their performance one-to-one with their appraisers. These appraisers could be the principal, other members of the senior management team or their supervisors on the methodical commissions.

The 2011 Education Law states that the school principal is responsible for the periodic assessment of staff, yet they do not currently have a prominent role in regular appraisals, other than contributing to the final evaluation of teachers as members of the school board. Reducing principals' administrative burden would enable them to play more of a pedagogical leadership role and progressively assume important responsibilities such as directing the appraisals that are conducted in their schools and nurturing a collaborative learning environment in which feedback is welcomed (see Chapter 4).

### *Adding key appraisal elements*

Romania's regular appraisal has several positive elements. It features self-appraisal, which prompts teachers to reflect on their own practice and learn from their own experiences. There is also evidence that activities to support teachers' development are happening in Romania's schools on an ongoing basis. In the 2013 TALIS survey, just under 90% of Romanian teachers reported receiving feedback on their teaching from their principal, or other members of the senior management team (just under 60%), and at least 90% had received feedback following classroom observations (OECD, 2014c). However, classroom observations and professional dialogue are not built into the methodology of Romania's regular appraisal process. Instead, it focuses on the completion of the standardised self-evaluation and evaluation form.

Classroom observations focus appraisals on teachers' interactions with students, which are of central importance if they are to support improvements to teaching and learning. Such observations are the most important way of identifying teachers' weaknesses (OECD, 2013a). Teachers also need feedback to ensure that those weaknesses are addressed. To incorporate these elements into regular appraisals, Romania could draw on the experience of other countries. For example, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) has built in meetings between appraisers and teachers before and after classroom observations to ensure that this professional dialogue occurs, in the form of collaboration, reflection and feedback (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

It is common for countries to use an initial meeting as an opportunity to discuss the teacher's performance objectives for the year and a meeting at the end of the review cycle to discuss what has been accomplished (OECD, 2013a). These meetings could also provide a means to assess the teacher's impact on student learning by including a discussion of student learning objectives and then a review of whether those objectives have been met. This is one of a number of methods of taking student performance data into account in the appraisal of teachers without relying heavily on raw national examination or standardised assessment results. As mentioned previously in this chapter, focusing on these raw results is problematic because it ignores the factors affecting student learning that are beyond the teacher's control and may encourage practices like "teaching to the test" and a narrowing of the curriculum.

### *Building appraisers' capacity*

In Romania, it will be essential for appraisers to receive preparation and support to ensure that they are able to reliably conduct classroom observations and provide constructive feedback to teachers (OECD, 2013a). Appraisal processes that involve classroom observations are associated with better student outcomes, but appraisers need appropriate guidance and instruments in order to conduct them effectively (OECD, 2013b). Since 2013, the Education Council of New Zealand, the professional body for teachers, has delivered a professional learning programme on appraisal practices to appraisers and teachers and has made a range of appraisal resources and guidelines available on its website (Education Council of New Zealand, 2016). Romania's IES could play an important role in developing these types of programmes, resources and common classroom observation instruments to support the regular appraisal process.

## ***Connecting regular appraisals with participation in continuing professional development***

Without a strong connection to continuing professional development, appraisals will have limited impact on teaching and learning (OECD, 2013a). Romania's regular appraisal process does not currently lead to the identification of teachers' learning needs or the professional development that would address them. Instead, participation in professional development tends to be an individual pursuit. Teachers' choices about which professional development to take are influenced by their need to accumulate continuing professional development credits for career advancement and job security (Zoller, 2015). To make real improvements to teaching and learning, Romania will need to ensure that professional learning opportunities address teachers' actual development needs and that schools have the capacity to implement collaborative learning activities which are embedded into teachers' jobs.

### *Integrating professional development objectives into the appraisal process*

The OECD review team's interviews with stakeholders indicated that appraisal results did not influence teachers' decisions about which professional development to take. CSI inspectors may recommend that teachers participate in professional development when they conduct general school inspections or specialty inspections, but these inspections are only conducted intermittently and teachers need not follow up on the recommendations. As such, Romania lacks a standard, ongoing process in which teachers identify their learning needs based on observations of, and discussions about their teaching practice. A professional learning plan as a part of a regular appraisal process would support this.

Ontario offers one example of an education system where teachers develop professional learning plans in consultation with their supervisors in order to address their development needs (OECD, 2013c). These plans are annual and include teachers' professional growth objectives, proposed actions and timelines (OECD, 2013c). The most effective schools improve teaching practices by encouraging their teachers to discuss their professional learning plans with each other so that they can support each other's growth (Cole, 2012). Research recommends that these learning plans be specific, practical and tied to the classroom, outlining:

- a few teaching techniques or changes to practice to be employed in order to improve student engagement and learning outcomes within a relatively short period of time
- the professional learning activities that will help teachers make those changes, including informal, collaborative learning with colleagues (Cole, 2012).

### *Strengthening professional development within schools*

The effectiveness of developmental appraisal rests on teachers having access to professional learning opportunities that address their needs. Professional learning is most effective at sustaining improvement to teachers' competence when it is collaborative and embedded in their work, including activities such as classroom observations, group discussions, and collective preparation of instructional material, coaching and mentoring (Schleicher, 2011).

Romania's schools do offer opportunities for professional development but these processes need strengthening. CSIs organise teachers' pedagogical circles, which meet two to four times per year, and teachers work together in each school's methodical commissions. However, it was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that the pedagogical circles tend to be formal and are mainly used to transmit information. Equally, teacher peer networks tend to be competitive rather than supportive and trusting learning environments. Teachers can also participate in training delivered outside the school but the content is determined centrally rather than being based on teacher needs (Zoller, 2015). While the CSIs and Teachers' Training Houses do try to adjust their professional development to reflect local teachers' needs, these courses are not always accredited and teachers may have to pay for them out of their own pockets (Zoller, 2015).

Research indicates that central government and district support is crucial to the success of schools' efforts to build their collaborative learning cultures (Kools and Stoll, 2016). Romania's CSIs should play a key role in supporting school-based improvement efforts, underpinned by central support and financial investment from the government (see Chapter 4). Professional development opportunities in schools could be supported by:

- **Strengthening peer groups and networks**. The MNESR could work with the IES to develop guidelines and effective practices to support CSIs and schools in strengthening the focus of their existing pedagogical circles and in-school groups on improving teaching and learning, and encouraging the provision of feedback and practices like self-reflection and modelling to improve teaching practice. International examples of similar professional learning communities include Finland's problem-solving groups, which meet regularly to plan, act and reflect on teaching challenges (OECD, 2011).
- **Enveloped funding for schools' staff development needs**. Professional development in Romania's schools could be supported by providing dedicated funding to be used to meet staff development needs within the school. In Estonia, for example, 1% of the state budget for teachers' salaries is provided to schools for their staff development needs. In Singapore each school has a fund used for continuing professional development, most of which is delivered on site (Kools and Stool, 2016; Santiago et al., 2016).
- **A competence-based teacher career path**. A new career path for teachers in Romania, with distinct roles focused on improving teaching across the school (e.g. mentor, coach), as recommended below, would support these efforts. This career path could be connected to professional development opportunities that allow teachers to develop the competencies they will need to progress in their careers (see Policy Issue 3.4).

Finally, the government's previously announced plans to provide a virtual library of resources to teachers would also help to address teachers' learning needs.

### *Connecting regular appraisal with school development*

Romania's schools are legally required to analyse the professional development needs of their staff to develop a school professional development plan (MNESR, 2011a). The OECD review team spoke with representatives of one school who stated that their teachers' council conducts questionnaires of teachers for this purpose, but recent research suggests that this requirement is not being implemented on a wide scale (Stingu et al., 2016).

A process that connects regular appraisal results to the development of a school-wide professional development plan, like the one undertaken in Korea (Box 3.3), would support improvements to teaching. There are a number of other ways in which the regular formative appraisal of teachers and school development could be mutually reinforcing. For example, teachers could be encouraged to consider their school development plans when setting out the objectives in their individual professional learning plans, as teachers do in Estonia (Santiago et al., 2016).

**Box 3.3. School planning for continuing professional development based on teacher appraisal results in Korea**

In Korea, each school has an appraisal management committee that reviews the appraisal results and professional development plans of all teachers in order to draft a school-wide report for submission to the principal and vice-principal. The committee's report includes:

- Information about appraisal results at an aggregate level (individual teachers are not identified), including the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching staff.
- Teachers' training requests, the school's professional development plans for the upcoming year and a budget estimate.
- Proposals and requests for the local education authority to develop new professional development programmes or to provide additional resources for the school's or teachers' own professional development.

*Source*: Kim, K. et al. (2010), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Korea*, Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Seoul, www.oecd.org/edu/school/49363138.pdf.

### *Addressing underperformance*

Romania does not have a standard, step-by-step process for dealing with teachers who receive an "unsatisfactory" result in the appraisal process. Identifying underperformance should not be the primary focus of a formative appraisal process, but because this type of appraisal is conducted regularly, it provides a means of quickly addressing weaknesses that could affect student learning (OECD, 2013a). Without a standard process to address underperformance, it is difficult for schools to compel teachers to improve. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that some schools in Romania may recommend that a teacher who does poorly on an appraisal should participate in professional development, but this participation is not considered a requirement. The school may also decide to no longer offer the teacher classroom hours as a way to remove them from the school, but in this case, the teacher would maintain their tenured status and could work in another school. The principal and the teachers' council have the legal authority to propose the sanctioning of teachers for poor performance, and the school board may enact those sanctions, but this appears to be entirely separate from the appraisal process (MNESR, 2011a).

It will be important for the MNESR to work with representatives of Romania's teachers' unions, CSIs and schools to establish a common and fair response to "unsatisfactory" regular appraisal results. A standard process for dealing with underperformance in many countries involves the development of an improvement plan identifying professional development needs, followed by additional appraisals and, ultimately, the involvement of external bodies responsible for dismissing the teacher if their performance does not improve (OECD, 2015). Northern Ireland, for example, has developed a Procedure for Supporting Effective Teaching in Schools, which clearly sets out the responsibilities of different actors and the steps involved in addressing underperformance (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

## Policy Issue 3.3: Improving the probation period and initial assessment of teachers

At the start of a teacher's career, summative appraisals serve as an important gatekeeper to the profession, while formative appraisals ensure that the teacher has the feedback and guidance they need to develop in their first years on the job. Romania will need to make strategic changes to both types of appraisals to ensure they fulfil these goals. Changing Romania's initial teacher education to provide the practical preparation in learner-centred teaching and formative assessment techniques that teachers need will help the next generation of teachers move forward with the country's education reform.

### *Making assessment for full qualification a more meaningful practical evaluation*

Appraisal for full teacher certification in Romania is a two-stage process. It begins with two inspections by CSI inspectors, who review beginning teachers' planning material, didactic activities, use of the curriculum and differentiated teaching practices. These are followed by a written examination of their knowledge of their subject area, applied didactics and pedagogy. Teachers must pass the inspections to proceed to the written exam. Both elements carry the same weight. To make this process more meaningful, Romania needs to consider changes relating to who conducts the appraisals and what is appraised.

#### *Using experienced teachers for the probation evaluation*

Romania's CSI inspectors are not well equipped to conduct the inspections of novice teachers. They do not receive training to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to reliably conduct classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers, which research identifies as essential (OECD, 2010). The CSIs also lack enough staff to conduct the inspections so some CSIs now use the services of experienced "methodical" teachers as temporary inspectors to help manage their workload. If CSI inspectors are to play a stronger role in supporting schools and their staff in improving teaching and learning, this will have implications for their specialty inspection responsibilities (see Chapter 4). A more supportive role does not align well with inspections that have high-stakes consequences for teachers' careers.

Given that the CSIs have already begun to use the services of experienced teachers to conduct inspections, the country might consider formalising this arrangement by shifting the responsibility for specialty inspections to a cadre of experienced teachers. Portugal, for example, uses experienced teachers as external evaluators, providing them with training and accreditation to undertake their role (Santiago et al., 2012b; Box 3.4). This model leverages the expertise of accomplished teachers who have in-depth subject matter knowledge and a high level of competence in pedagogy (OECD, 2010). The MNESR could establish procedures to select and manage these teachers and work with the IES to develop training material for them. The teachers could be selected centrally or at the county level with the CSIs overseeing their work according to central procedures, and ensuring that they participate in the appropriate training. The procedures would include arrangements to ensure that evaluators are not assessing teachers with whom they are familiar.

The involvement of external appraisers in appraisals that have high-stakes consequences for a teacher's career is important to ensure that these appraisals are consistent and fair (OECD, 2010). However, it will also be important for Romania to ensure that these summative appraisals draw on the input of the individuals who are

familiar with a teacher's performance and conduct regular appraisals within the school (see below and Policy Issue 3.2).

**Box 3.4. Appraisers for completion of probation**

Of the 29 countries reviewed for the OECD study *Synergies for Better Learning* (OECD, 2013a), 15 appraise teachers to complete their probation. In seven of these countries, school-based evaluators (e.g. the principal, mentors or other members of the school management team) conduct the appraisal. This arrangement lacks an element of externality to ensure appraisals are fair and reliable. Six countries use a combination of school-based and external evaluators.

In 2011, Portugal adopted a new model of teacher appraisal in which experienced teachers serve as external evaluators. Fifty teachers with master's degrees in evaluation were selected from across Portugal's five education regions to form a pool of external evaluators. They participated in specialised training on teacher appraisal that focused on classroom observation and was delivered by a higher education institution under contract to the government. These external evaluators were then responsible for appraising teachers in their subject area who were at or below their level on the teacher career path. In addition to these external evaluators, appraisers within schools conduct some elements of the teacher appraisal process. In this way, both internal and external appraisers inform decisions about whether the teacher has successfully passed the appraisal.

*Sources*: Santiago, P. et al. (2012b), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Portugal 2012*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264117020-en; OECD (2013a), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

### *A well-designed performance-based assessment*

The proposed cadre of experienced teacher appraisers would be responsible for conducting a well-designed performance-based assessment. Although classroom observation is the most common and important assessment method for this purpose, other methods include interviews or dialogue with teachers, and a review of material developed by them, such as lesson plans (OECD, 2013a). These methods provide evidence of teachers' performance in their actual work environment, including their interactions with students, as well as insights into what teachers are thinking and how they make decisions (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007). Romania already employs some of these methods. Using them to assess the core work of teaching against common professional teaching standards, once developed, including competencies appropriate to beginning teachers' experience level, would strengthen this component of the appraisal for completing probation.

The OECD review team's discussions with new teachers in Romania indicated that current inspections do not necessarily result in useful, constructive feedback. Internationally, performance-based assessments for completion of probation can serve a developmental function on top of their quality assurance one if they result in feedback to support teachers' improvement and inform their participation in professional development activities. This is a common outcome of appraisals for the completion of probation in a range of different countries, and it would benefit teachers in Romania (OECD, 2013a).

The MNESR should work with teachers and other relevant stakeholders on these revisions and the development of:

- guidelines that set out how appraisals are to be conducted, and provide examples of constructive feedback and how competencies are demonstrated in practice

- standardised appraisal forms that prompt appraisers to provide comments in relation to the competencies that are being evaluated.

This kind of material will be important to support the implementation of this and all other forms of teacher appraisal in Romania. It will increase the likelihood that appraisals will be consistently applied and that the process will be viewed as objective and fair.

Combining performance-based assessments by external appraisers with input from the in-school evaluators who conduct beginning teachers' annual appraisals, and the results of the *definitivat* exam, once revised and carefully weighted (see below), means that the appraisal for completion of probation would be based on multiple sources of evidence of teachers' competence. This is particularly important for high-stakes appraisals, which should be based on as much evidence as possible (OECD, 2013a).

### *Rethinking the definitivat exam*

Romania appears to use the *definitivat* exam, as well as the exam for tenure, as the main method of screening candidates entering the teaching profession. This is evidenced by beginning teachers' relatively low rates of success on the exams. In 2015, 51% of teachers failed the *definitivat* exam and 73% failed the tenure test (although the teachers who take this test are not all new to the profession) (SIIIR, 2016). Using such tests as the main method of screening potential teachers is much less efficient than having high standards for entry to initial teacher education programmes and comprehensive initial teacher preparation (Hobson et al., 2010). The fact that teachers who receive below passing marks (i.e. between five and seven) on the *definitivat* exam can still work in schools as teachers under fixed-term contracts also raises questions about the effectiveness of the exam as a quality-assurance measure. TALIS 2013 results indicate that a significant percentage of teachers in Romania fall into this category, having missed the *definitivat* passing grade by a couple of marks (OECD, 2014c).

The *definitivat* exam carries as much weight in the appraisal for probation and registration as the inspections. The exam, which is different for each school level and subject in the curriculum, includes multiple-choice and short answer or essay questions. Some questions ask candidates to demonstrate that they can apply their knowledge of pedagogy, e.g. "devise a reading activity" (SEI, 2015). This suggests that the test does more than assess candidates' theory and content knowledge. However, this does not mean that it provides an authentic measure of on-the-job competence, which was a concern expressed by stakeholders in Romania.

It will be important for the ministry and key stakeholders, including NCAE, teachers and initial teacher education providers, to work together to explore how other countries assess teachers' readiness for full certification to determine what changes may need to be made to the *definitivat* exam, including:

- **Ensuring that the *definitivat* exam is balanced by high-quality performance-based assessments.** In general, it is difficult for a written exam to meaningfully measure the complex competencies required for successful teaching (Hobson et al., 2010). There is limited research evidence to support their use. Most countries that do use them for entry to the teaching profession do not rely heavily on them (OECD, 2010). Instead, they tend to balance these tests with other methods of assessment. A well-designed performance-based assessment, conducted by trained evaluators and using methods such as those described above, provides a more authentic measure of teachers' competence than a written

test, as they assess real teaching in a real classroom setting (Roelofs, 2007 in OECD, 2010).

As long as Romania continues to have relatively low entry requirements into initial teacher education programmes and programmes remain variable in quality, there is a rationale for maintaining the *definitivat* exam as an objective measure of knowledge and skills. However, once Romania further develops its performance-based assessment of teachers along the lines suggested above, the country should consider reducing the weight of the *definitivat* exam in the appraisal process. In the longer term, once the Master of Arts in teaching has been rolled out and its quality evaluated (see below), Romania might revisit whether it still needs to include a written exam at all.

- **Ensuring that the *definitivat* exam assesses the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum**. It was reported to the OECD review team in interviews with stakeholders that the contents of the *definitivat* exam were out of date and did not reflect the new learner-centred curriculum, which focuses on developing students' competencies (see Chapter 2). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Romania should develop professional teaching standards that describe what teachers need to know and be able to do to effectively deliver this curriculum. These standards should also guide revisions to questions in the *definitivat* exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers will need in the classroom and as professionals.

  Romania may also consider other changes to the contents of the *definitivat* exam. For example, research recommends that exams for entry to the teaching profession contain a sufficient number of open-ended questions to provide a useful measure of teachers' competencies (OECD, 2010). In the United States, one component of the process to obtain certification with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a written assessment, which includes essay questions that ask teachers to demonstrate their subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and analyse teaching situations, evaluate curriculum material and develop lesson plans (OECD, 2014b). Romania might consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the *definitivat* exam, and conducting a thorough piloting phase to refine them.

- **Reviewing the minimum standard to teach in Romania's schools**. As part of the revision process, Romania will need to establish the minimum threshold for passing the revised *definitivat* exam. Currently, beginning teachers who receive a five to seven out of ten on the *definitivat* exam but do not obtain the higher grade required for permanent teacher certification, even after several attempts, can continue to work in schools under fixed-term contracts. This undermines the quality assurance function of this particular appraisal process, which should provide a signal to the public that a teacher has met the minimum standard for certification.

  Romania should consider establishing a firm minimum standard to ensure that, wherever possible, those who teach in the country's schools, other than beginning teachers in their probation year, are individuals who have obtained permanent teacher certification. Beginning teachers who fail the *definitivat* exam should be given the opportunity to develop competencies in areas where they have identified weaknesses, but if they are not able to meet the standard to gain permanent

teacher certification after a specified number of attempts, they should not continue to teach in the country's schools as uncertified teachers.

*Giving more voice to schools in the teacher hiring process*

The MNESR and key stakeholders should also conduct a comparable review of the contents of the tests for tenure to ensure that it reflects the new professional teaching standards, including the competencies needed to deliver the updated pre-university curriculum. In the future, if Romania proceeds with decentralising responsibility for hiring teachers to schools, as was originally set out in the 2011 Education Law, it could consider replacing or supplementing the tenure test with teacher recruitment methods that are more responsive to schools' needs. Common methods that are used internationally and would be more effective in assessing candidates' competence and fit for a school, include interviews, portfolio assessments and observations of teaching (Hobson et al., 2010).

### *Providing mentorship, regular feedback and monitoring to support new teachers during their probation*

Romania recognises the importance of mentoring new teachers. EU-funded mentorship projects have existed in Romania since the early 2000s, and the 2011 Teaching Staff Statute introduced the requirement that all beginning teachers be supervised by mentors during their probation period. The mentorship role appears to be a purely supportive one; mentors are not expected to directly appraise beginning teachers. This is a positive feature as it may increase the likelihood that teachers will seek help from their mentors to address their development needs (OECD, 2010).

Mentorship, however, is not yet a fully functional induction support. A number of new teachers who participated in interviews with the OECD review team either had not been assigned a mentor or had only been assigned one "in theory". A policy setting out selection criteria and training for mentors has been released but not yet applied (Stingu et al., 2016). The review team found evidence that at least one CSI is conducting mentorship training, but this function has not been formally assigned to CSIs nationally. Overall, many questions remain about how mentorship is to be implemented in Romania.

*Ensuring that the mentorship role is implemented in schools*

Investing in mentoring beginning teachers is a powerful form of in-school professional development. If well designed, this type of induction support can increase new teachers' competence and job satisfaction, and improve student achievement (OECD, 2014c). Induction is particularly important if, as in Romania, there are concerns about a lack of initial teacher preparation (OECD, 2010). As such, it will be important for the ministry to work with stakeholders to implement and fund mentorships, keeping in mind the features of effective induction programmes (Box 3.5).

*Closely monitoring new teachers and providing regular feedback.*

The ministry could also work with stakeholders to consider how beginning teachers can be closely monitored and receive regular qualitative feedback, including advice about professional learning opportunities that will support their competency development. In England (United Kingdom), for example, new teachers are observed six times in their classroom and their practice outside the classroom is also monitored (OECD, 2010).

Beginning teachers in Romania will also benefit from stronger formative appraisal, as part of the regular developmental appraisal process (see Policy Issue 3.2).

**Box 3.5. Effective teacher induction**

Research identifies the following as elements of effective teacher induction:

- There are clear roles and responsibilities laid out for all actors involved in induction, including new teachers, mentors, school leaders, central and local authorities, and (if applicable) initial teacher education providers, and all share a common understanding of high-quality teaching.
- National authorities provide funding and a framework for the induction programme, and local authorities support schools with its implementation.
- School leaders oversee the implementation of induction, establish a culture of collaboration and learning in their school, give new teachers and mentors enough time to work together, and ensure that new teachers are not assigned the most challenging classes.
- Mentors are selected and trained for their roles and carefully matched with their new teacher, model exemplary practice, and provide on-the-job support that is relevant to the new teacher's curriculum subject(s).
- New teachers have opportunities to observe and work with mentors and other experienced teachers, participate in professional development that addresses their needs, and reflect on their teaching practice (e.g. by compiling a portfolio of their work).

*Sources*: European Commission (2010), *Developing Coherent and system-wide Induction Programmes for Beginning Teachers: A Handbook for Policymakers,* Staff working document, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/ha ndbook0410 en.pdf ; OECD (2005), *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264018044-en; OECD (2010), "Teacher career paths: Consolidating a quality profession" in *Improving Schools: Strategies for Actions in Mexico*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264087040-5-en.

### *Ensuring that in-school appraisers provide input to probation appraisal*

Out of 15 OECD countries with specific appraisal processes for new teachers, appraisals for the completion of probation generally involve in-school appraisers, either as the sole appraisers (in seven countries) or sharing responsibility with external evaluators (in six countries). These school-based appraisers are most often the school principal, followed by the teacher's supervisor (OECD, 2013a). In Romania, input from school-based appraisers could inform the results of the summative appraisal for completing probation. As with the regular appraisal process, the MNESR or the IES could develop supports (such as online resources and information about effective practices that help appraisers to work with beginning teachers) as well as guidelines to help appraisers understand beginning teachers' contexts and particular needs.

### *Making sure the portfolio serves as a tool for self-reflection*

In Romania, beginning teachers are currently required to maintain a portfolio, which could be converted into a more useful formative tool. The existing portfolio is a compilation of 20 or 30 documents, including the teacher's curriculum vitae (CV) and

information about their continuing professional development. It is sometimes but not always checked as part of the appraisal for completion of probation. The ministry could instead require that it be used as a formative tool, which beginning teachers could discuss with their principals and mentors. This would mean changing its contents to include a collection of documentary evidence of beginning teachers' work with students, such as lesson plans or assessments of students' progress (Hobson et al., 2010). This type of portfolio would encourage self-reflection.

### *Proceeding with improvements to initial teacher education*

Teacher preparation is the first building block in teachers' ongoing learning and development. It also provides a means to support system-wide education reform. Discussions with stakeholders and recent research indicate that Romania's current initial teacher education modules do not sufficiently prepare teachers in the kinds of learner-centred and inclusive teaching and assessment methods that are key to the country's education reform (European Commission, 2015a). A recent study found that secondary teachers and teacher educators in Romania felt that some aspects of student-centred methods were covered in initial teacher education modules (e.g. encouraging students to share opinions or using active teaching strategies) but that preparation was generally theoretical rather than practical (Domilescu, 2014).

#### *Aligning existing modules with the learner-centred curriculum*

In the short to medium term, it will be important for the MNESR to work with initial teacher education providers to revise the contents and practicum of the existing modules in order to address the above issues. Teacher candidates will benefit from programmes that provide up-to-date content on the new curriculum that incorporates competence, learner-centred teaching methods and formative assessment strategies and practicum opportunities that are structured to allow them to practise these techniques in the classroom (see Chapter 2).

The ministry will also need to work with providers to raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes in order to limit candidates to those who are motivated to teach. In other countries, interviews are used, among other possible selection methods, to identify top candidates with strong interpersonal and communication skills, a willingness to learn and an interest in teaching (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

#### *Designing and progressively implementing a new initial teacher education programme*

When proceeding with plans to implement the new Master of Arts in teaching programme, it will be important for the ministry, initial teacher education providers and other key stakeholders to work together to ensure that the programme's contents cover the teaching and assessment methods that teachers will need to deliver the revised school curriculum. Once developed, professional teaching standards could act as a guide to the development of the programme's contents, as well as specific accreditation criteria, which are currently lacking.

Based on current plans it seems that the new programme will offer considerably more practice teaching time than the current initial teacher education modules (187 hours compared to 78-120 hours) and include research tutorials culminating in the preparation of a dissertation (MNESR, 2012c). This is in keeping with international trends. Initial teacher education programmes should aim to provide practicums that offer a breadth of

experience under the supervision of well-trained mentor teachers, and opportunities to conduct research devoted to instructional practice and the realities of the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This type of research encourages self-reflection, which is an important learning method for teachers and their students.

Romania will need to address the issues that prevented the past implementation of the Master of Arts in teaching programme. These reportedly included a lack of consultation with initial teacher education providers and differences in providers' capacity to deliver the new programme. Going forward, the ministry will need to consult with providers and might consider adopting a flexible approach to implementation, recognising that not all institutions will be ready to provide the new programme at the outset. New Zealand provides an example of a government that is working with providers to pilot a new master's programme to prepare teachers, beginning with the institutions that are ready for implementation (Box 3.6).

**Box 3.6. Revising initial teacher education in New Zealand**

The Government of New Zealand introduced a Quality Teaching Agenda in 2013 to strengthen the capacity of the country's teachers and increase the status of the profession. As part of this agenda, the government plans to improve the quality of initial teacher education by introducing post-graduate programmes. In 2013 and 2015, the government invited initial teacher education providers to submit proposals for funding to pilot a small number of master's programmes. Proposals were expected to:

- clearly describe the outcomes to be demonstrated by graduating teachers, including "cultural responsiveness and agency to achieve equitable outcomes for priority student groups" and how these would differ from current outcomes
- present a more integrated and collaborative approach to initial teacher education between providers and schools
- outline how the capacity of teacher educators, mentors and coaches would be developed to ensure initial teacher preparation is of high quality.

This process is based on the experiences of countries like Singapore, where new initiatives are piloted before being introduced across their education system. The pilot phase is intended to identify strengths and exemplary practices while building an evidence base to support the widespread expansion of the initial teacher education master's programme. It will also reveal the level of demand among students. The universities of Auckland, Waikato and Otago were selected to begin piloting programmes in 2014; there has been high student demand.

*Source*: New Zealand Ministry of Education (2016), "Lifting the quality of initial teacher education provision (ITE)", New Zealand Ministry of Education, www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/lifting-the-quality-of-initial-teacher-education-provision/.

## Policy Issue 3.4: Rewarding and incentivising teachers' development of higher competency levels

Romania needs to reconsider teachers' career paths and the appraisal process for career progression to encourage teachers to continually improve their teaching practices and to recognise and reward teachers' higher levels of competency. Competency-based teacher appraisal can support career paths that give teachers incentives to develop their knowledge and the skills they need to take on additional roles and responsibilities. This

opens up new job possibilities for classroom teachers, and allows schools to make better use of teachers' full complement of skills to improve student learning.

### *Revising teachers' career paths to connect key stages with standards-based competencies and greater responsibilities*

Currently, as teachers progress along the three-level career path in Romania, they are rewarded with salary increases, but they are not encouraged to take on new roles and responsibilities commensurate with greater skills. Stakeholders expressed concern that the career path may not be motivating teachers, partly because the highest qualification level can be reached in less than 10 years. The current system therefore represents a missed opportunity to use the career path strategically to motivate teachers to improve their skills and to ensure more experienced and competent teachers share their expertise within and across schools.

#### *Creating differentiated career paths*

A number of countries have introduced career paths for teachers where different stages or positions are associated with new responsibilities (Box 3.7). The OECD has suggested that countries consider adopting a three-stage path with, for example, competent teacher, established teacher and expert teacher stages (OECD, 2013a). Research recommends that, within each career stage, teachers have the opportunity to progress up salary steps, so that those who wish to remain in the classroom and not take on additional responsibilities are still rewarded for their experience and efforts (Santiago et al., 2012a). Outside of this career path, teachers could still pursue leadership positions at the school or county level once they have reached a certain career stage and/or experience level.

**Box 3.7. Examples of differentiated teacher career paths**

In 1996, Lithuania introduced a multi-stage teacher career path:

- junior teachers, at the initial stage on the career path
- teachers who have spent one year in the classroom and are fully qualified for the teaching role
- senior teachers with two years of experience, and who are responsible for coaching other teachers in their school
- methodists, who have at least five years of experience as a senior teacher, and coach teachers across the district
- experts, who have at least seven years of experience as methodists, coach teachers at the national level and contribute to the development of the national curriculum.

Singapore has different career tracks for teachers, including a teaching track for educators who wish to pursue excellence in teaching, a leadership track (e.g. for school administration), and a specialist track (e.g. for curriculum designers or researchers). Classroom teachers may progress up four levels on the teaching track, and take on the following responsibilities:

- senior teachers serve as mentors to younger colleagues within their school
- lead teachers take on key roles within a cluster of schools
- master and principal master teachers demonstrate good teaching practices and model lessons for a wider range of teachers (e.g. by leading Networked Learning Communities of teachers).

**Box 3.7. Examples of differentiated teacher career paths *(continued)***

In 2013, Australia introduced four teacher career stages – graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead – and began a two-year pilot of the latter two stages in 2014-15. As teachers progress along these career stages, they are expected to show increasing knowledge, practice and professional engagement as described in professional teaching standards. Highly accomplished teachers are expected to contribute to their colleagues' learning, acting as guides, advisers and leaders. Lead teachers are expected to lead processes that improve student outcomes (e.g. evaluating and revising programmes, and analysing student assessment data).

*Sources*: Singapore Ministry of Education (2001), "More career advancement opportunities for teachers", Ministry of Education, www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2001/pr26092001.htm; Mourshed, M. et al. (2010), *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, Mckinsey, London ; AITSL (2014a), "Australian professional standards for teachers – Career stages", Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers/standards/overview/career-stages

### *Aligning greater responsibilities with higher competency levels*

As Romania develops a common set of professional teaching standards, it will be important for the MNESR, in consultation with the teachers' unions and other key stakeholders, to revise the existing teaching career path to associate different stages of a teacher's career with additional roles and responsibilities.

Standards would form the basis of a career path that rewards teachers for attaining higher competency levels (OECD, 2010). For example, each standard could be accompanied by a description of competencies and how teachers at different levels (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), would demonstrate them. In this way, teachers would be able to reach a higher stage on the career path when they demonstrate, through an appraisal process (see below), that they have reached competency levels equivalent to that stage. This process would help to identify individuals who have the potential to take on roles as school leaders or CSI inspectors (see Chapter 4) but it would also reward excellent teachers who wish to remain in a teaching role.

Romania currently identifies four areas of competencies for the Level II and I qualification: professional, psycho-pedagogical, psycho-social and classroom management. However, without unifying teaching standards, these currently represent another description of the teacher's role that exists on its own, separate from teachers' job descriptions and the criteria for the various appraisal processes. Creating one set of professional teaching standards, and competency levels for each standard and using them to appraise teachers for career advancement would ensure that the education system shares a common understanding of the teacher's role and the competencies teachers need to develop in order to be promoted (Box 3.8).

**Box 3.8. What is teacher competence and how should competencies be identified?**

There are many different definitions of teacher competence. According to Roelofs and Sanders (2007), this term encompasses: teacher traits, teacher knowledge, teacher behaviour, teacher thinking, situation-specific decision making, and the impact teachers have on student learning.

Countries generally use the following processes to identify teacher competencies:

- analysing how teachers work
- consulting excellent teachers and other practicing professionals
- conducting research on factors that relate to higher learning performance among students.

For example, Singapore's Ministry of Education contracted researchers to interview teachers to identify the competencies that distinguished successful educators to inform the development of a competency-based appraisal process that is used to promote teachers along a career track (senior teacher, lead teacher, master teacher and principal master teacher). Teachers are appraised in five areas: nurturing the whole child, cultivating knowledge, working with others, knowing self and others, and winning hearts and minds. An example of the competency levels for teacher and master teacher within "teaching creativity", which falls under the "cultivating knowledge" area includes the following:

- All teachers use routine methods to teach, provide worksheets and notes, appeal to students' interests by using specific techniques and approaches to teach concepts, and assess learning through simple questioning.
- Master teachers use a variety of approaches, use reflective questioning to assist student comprehension, teach a range of concepts simultaneously, exploit learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom, and inspire learning beyond the curriculum.

Countries have also used existing frameworks, like Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, as a guide to their development of competency-based appraisal processes.

*Sources*: Roelofs, E. and P. Sanders (2007), "Towards a framework for assessing teacher competence" *European Journal of Vocational Education,* Vol. 40/1, pp. 123-139; Steiner, L. (2010), *Using Competency-Based Evaluation to Drive Teacher Excellence: Lessons from Singapore*, Public Impact, Chapel Hill, http://opportunityculture.org/images/stories/singapore_lessons_2010.pdf.

### *Ensuring expertise in the system is recognised and used*

In addition to identifying standards and related competencies, another essential component of this work would be a review of teachers' existing roles and responsibilities to determine how they should relate to the different stages of a teacher's career and whether new positions need to be developed. In OECD countries with diverse career paths, roles and responsibilities generally become increasingly complex as teachers advance (Schleicher, 2012). They may include responsibilities like mentoring new teachers or serving as external evaluators for summative appraisal processes (see Policy Issue 3.3), co-ordinating continuing professional development or school projects, as well as more common responsibilities like serving as a department head (OECD, 2013a). Many of these roles already exist in Romania, but they are not considered part of the teaching career path and they are not associated with higher salaries. Consolidating those roles that are dedicated to improving teaching and learning (such as coaching and mentoring) would be particularly beneficial in Romania.

### *Establishing salaries that support new teaching career paths*

In developing new teaching career paths, the MNESR will need to work with the teachers' unions and stakeholders to review the salary grid. Given that teachers' salaries are low, efforts will need to be made to ensure that teachers are not penalised financially by the shift from a career path based on the didactical qualification levels to one in which career stages are associated with new roles and responsibilities that are dictated, in part, by actual vacancies. In Australia, for example, the highly accomplished teacher (HAT) and lead teacher (LT) levels have their own salary steps but salary increases do not automatically result from obtaining those levels. Instead, they are connected to the particular responsibilities the teacher takes on as an HAT or LT within a school, which may involve a job competition (AEU SA Branch, 2016).

## ***Using appraisal for career progression to authentically measure higher levels of competency***

A multi-stage teacher career path, where teachers take on greater responsibilities related to increased competency levels, requires a career advancement appraisal process that focuses on measuring teachers' competencies and is rooted in the actual work that they do. Romania's current appraisal processes for career progression – namely the examinations and CSI inspections that lead to the didactical qualifications – are not well adapted for this purpose. The weight they give to success in theoretical exams may also distract teachers from developing competencies that are more important to the quality of their teaching and student learning, while reinforcing the system's over-reliance on tests to evaluate performance.

### *Romania's didactical appraisals do not authentically measure teachers' competencies*

In Romania, the written and oral examinations and other academic requirements for career progression are detached from teachers' role in the classroom and the school, which makes it difficult for them to authentically measure teachers' competency. There are drawbacks to any examination of teachers' practice that is not rooted in the classroom or the school (Hobson et al., 2010). Dissertations and oral presentations may demonstrate mastery of theoretical content, but fail to give any real indication of the quality of a teacher's work in the context in which that work is conducted (Hobson et al., 2010). Stakeholders in Romania stated that this was indeed a significant concern with the didactical exams. Developed by universities, these exams, like the contents of Romania's initial teacher education programmes, are considered to be theoretical and removed from the classroom.

The other element of Romania's career advancement appraisals, the specialty inspection of teachers by CSI inspectors, is rooted in classroom observation. However, the number of teachers inspectors are required to observe – more than 1 800 over the course of a year in one county the OECD review team visited – hinders their capacity to meaningfully evaluate teachers' practice (Bucharest County School Inspectorate, 2014). Moreover, although a minister's order sets out competencies associated with the different didactical qualification levels, the inspections do not seem to measure whether teachers have attained those competencies.

### *Reviewing who conducts the appraisal for career advancement and what it is based on*

In Romania, an appraisal process that focuses on the core work of teaching rather than the completion of academic requirements like examinations would offer a more authentic assessment of teachers' higher competency levels for career progression. This would require a change in who conducts the appraisals, as well as the methods and sources of evidence used. Australia's career advancement appraisal process includes elements Romania may wish to consider in moving forward with changes to its appraisal for career progression (Box 3.9). This would include:

- **Using a cadre of trained, experienced teachers to lead the appraisal**. Research recommends that well-trained external evaluators conduct at least some part of any appraisals for career advancement, assessing teachers against common professional teaching standards to ensure objectivity and fairness (Santiago et al., 2012a). In Romania, a cadre of carefully selected and trained experienced teachers, as proposed above for probation appraisals, would be well placed to serve as external evaluators. Moving this responsibility to trained experienced teachers would also help CSIs move towards a more supportive, rather than evaluative, role for schools (see Chapter 4), and reduce their workload.
- **Basing the assessment on teaching standards**. The role of the external evaluator would be to assess teachers' practice in the classroom against competency levels connected to the new teaching standards. Common methods for this type of assessment include classroom observation, self-assessment, assessment of material developed by the teacher and interviews (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007; OECD, 2013a). Methods that examine broad evidence of teachers' work in relation to student learning are the most valuable for appraising teachers' competence for career advancement (Roelofs and Sanders, 2007).
- **Drawing on input from regular school-based appraisals**. In order to obtain a full picture of a teacher's practice, research recommends that career advancement appraisals take into account input from those involved in the regular, school-based appraisal of teachers (OECD, 2013a). As suggested earlier in this chapter, Romania should consider adopting this practice. Gathering input from these appraisers would also reduce the need for multiple external inspections.

### *Changing the requirements for professional development*

Romania might also consider rethinking the role that the accumulation of continuing professional development credits plays in career progression. In 2013, Estonia established a new teacher career structure and a competency-based process for appraising teachers for higher career stages, removing the requirement that teachers undertake 160 hours of professional development courses every 5 years in order to be eligible for a higher stage. Instead of this requirement, Estonia is introducing a system in which professional development is specifically targeted to support teachers' development of the competencies they will need for higher career stages and new roles. Opportunities for career progression serve to incentivise teachers' participation in the professional development (Santiago et al., 2016).

**Box 3.9. Appraisals for highly accomplished teacher and lead teacher certification in Australia**

In Australia, certifying authorities within each state follow a national framework to assess teachers for certification as highly accomplished teachers or lead teachers based on professional teaching standards developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Teachers must have received satisfactory results on at least two regular annual appraisals conducted by their principal/supervisor in order to be eligible for this assessment.

The assessment process is conducted by external assessors who complete a national training programme as preparation for their role. It consists of three stages:

1. Pre-assessment stage: the teacher determines their readiness for certification and conducts a mandatory professional discussion with their principal or supervisor.
2. Assessment stage 1: the teacher submits evidence against the teaching standards, including material documenting their teaching practice and two classroom observation reports, one of which must be completed by their principal/supervisor, and comments from referees.
3. Assessment stage 2: the teacher's practice is assessed by an external assessor, which involves an observation, and discussions with the teacher's principal or supervisor and the teacher.

Certifications are awarded for five years. Teachers must contact their certifying authority 12 months prior to their expiry date if they wish to renew their certification. This process involves submitting documentation demonstrating evidence against the standards for review by external assessors. A range of guidelines and reference documents are available on the AITSL website to support teachers with the certification and renewal process.

*Sources*: AITSL (2014b), "Certification – Frequently asked questions" Australia Institute for Teaching and School Leadership website, www.aitsl.edu.au/certification/frequently-asked-questions; AITSL (2015), *Guide to the Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia,* Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership website, www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/certification-resources/guide-to-cert_online.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

### *Considering a requirement for recertification in the future*

In the long term, to strengthen quality assurance, Romania might also consider using an appraisal process similar to Estonia's to periodically renew teachers' certification. This could mean, for example, that all teachers would be required to apply for appraisal to renew their certificates after a certain period of time, while those seeking to progress in their careers would apply voluntarily (OECD, 2013a). This would provide some external quality assurance and accountability for those teachers who choose not to pursue career progression, since in this case their only regular appraisal would be internal, and primarily focused on their development. At the present time, the certifying body in Romania is the MNESR. To further professionalise the role of the teacher and to encourage teachers to feel ownership of their certification and standards, Romania might consider delegating the authority for certification to a teacher organisation, such as a self-regulatory body.

### *The merit grade assessment may distort teaching practices and unfairly reward teachers*

In December 2016, Romania issued a minister's order that added new criteria to assess teachers for a merit grade bonus (Box 3.10). This reflects a positive development that should help to ensure that teachers in all types of schools, including those who work in disadvantaged socio-economic contexts and who teach students of diverse ability levels will have a fair chance of being awarded the merit grade salary bonus. Previously, the assessment criteria emphasised teachers' work with students who achieved exceptional results on examinations and competitions. For example, according to an assessment template used by the Bucharest School Inspectorate in the 2015/16 school year, teachers earned considerably more points per year for preparing academic Olympic teams or working with students who won prizes in academic competitions than for their work in other areas (Bucharest County School Inspectorate, 2016). While the new assessment criteria encourage teachers' efforts to support struggling students, it is unclear how they will affect the assessment process in practice given that other criteria continue to reward teachers for having high-achieving students. This risks influencing teaching practices, encouraging a narrow focus on preparation for tests and academic competitions. This distortion is currently evident in Romania.

**Box 3.10. Romania's merit grade assessment criteria**

Romania's merit grade assessment evaluates teachers' work against four main criteria, including:

Complex activities with instructive-educative value – 70 %:

- Exceptional results achieved in preparing students to reach objectives in the school curriculum, evidenced by students' progress in class and on national tests and exams, and individual student or class results in specialty subjects in vocational education.
- Performance in preparing students for school Olympiads or other academic competitions, evidenced by obtaining the 1st, 2nd or 3rd prize, or special prizes at county/national/international level.
- Outstanding results achieved in preparing students from disadvantaged backgrounds or students with special educational needs and other learning difficulties.
- Designing and implementing innovative teaching methods; and innovative educational classes and projects to support the learning progress of each child, including those at risk of dropping out of school and children with special educational needs, and producing or using innovative curriculum drawn from educational research.

Outstanding performance in didactical/managerial innovation – 10 %

- Developing school curricula, methodological guides or textbooks; writing books and scientific papers in didactics and educational management; creating educational software; evaluating textbooks, acting as a mentor or trainer in lifelong learning programmes for teachers; working as methodologist teachers or as a member of a council or commission.
- Participating in professional development programmes on improving the learning outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with special education needs and other learning difficulties, or gifted students, and developing innovative professional development for teachers who work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds or vulnerable students.

**Box 3.10. Romania's merit grade assessment criteria *(continued)***

Involvement in projects – 15 %

- Initiating and organising extracurricular activities to prevent and combat early school leaving.
- Involvement in European or international projects aimed at academic performance, educational progress, developing students' skills, civic education, shaping students' personality and competencies; the professional development of teachers; the organisation of, and preparing students for extracurricular activities; and co-ordinating networking activities or projects within or across schools.

Contribution to institutional development – 5 %

- Attracting extra-budgetary funding to the school for its educational programmes and projects, research and information centres, laboratories etc., resulting in an increase in the quality of the school and in the quality of the teaching-learning-evaluation process, and conducting extracurricular projects, with extra-budgetary funding, aimed at increasing the quality of education and institutional development.
- Working to improve education to benefit the school community and meet institutional development targets; building institutional partnerships with organisations or institutions and/or conducting activities with them to address the needs of the school community.
- Promoting quality education, including for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Source*: MNESR (2016b), "Ordinul MENCS nr. 6161/2016 - aprobarea Metodologiei şi criteriilor privind acordarea gradaţiei de merit personalului didactic din învăţământul preuniversitar de stat în sesiunea 2017"[Order of the Minister 6161/2016 approving the methodology for and criteria for granting merit gradation of teaching staff in state pre-session 2017], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, http://legeaz.net/monitorul-oficial-21-2017/omencs-6161-2016-metodologie-criterii-acordare-gradatie-merit-invatamant-preuniversitar

An appraisal process that ranks teachers, like Romania's merit grade assessment, where a certain percentage of the highest ranked individual teachers are granted a reward, may also promote competition among teachers rather than the collegial and collaborative relationships that are essential to high-quality teaching and learning (OECD, 2009).

In addition, unless teachers are ranked in a way that is relatively fair, for example, by comparing them with teachers who work in schools with similar demographics, teachers in challenging schools will be at a disadvantage (OECD, 2009). It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that this is the case in Romania, where teachers in the country's rural schools have not had the same opportunities to do well in the merit grade assessment as those in schools with students who excel academically or are more involved in extracurricular activities. When issuing performance rewards, it is an important general principle that all teachers, regardless of the subject they teach or their education level, should be eligible for them (OECD, 2013a). The new merit grade assessment does attempt to resolve this issue to some extent, by including specific criteria on educational progress among disadvantaged students, which will compare teachers working in similarly disadvantaged schools.

Finally, in Romania, teachers reportedly submit, and evaluators are required to review, a large amount of paperwork as part of this assessment process. This is due, in part, to a reported lack of clarity around how assessment criteria should be demonstrated.

The wording of the assessment criteria, which can be vague or repetitive, may contribute to this challenge.

*Developing fairer and more equitable ways to recognise and reward teachers*

This OECD review recommends that Romania consider ending its current merit grade salary bonus, and recognise and reward teachers in other ways instead, notably by developing a teacher career path where additional roles and responsibilities lead to higher remuneration. Using an appraisal process for career advancement in to new roles, such as the one outlined above, would be a fairer and more equitable way to give teachers incentives to build competencies in many different areas associated with effective teaching.

These new career paths will require changes to the salary grid so that teachers' higher competency levels are rewarded with higher remuneration. Teachers in Romania reported to the OECD review team that the merit grade salary bonus is currently needed to supplement their low salaries. Policy makers should also consider instituting a general increase in teachers' salaries, particularly for new teachers, so that top candidates are attracted to the profession.

If Romania decides to maintain the merit grade salary bonus, it will be important for it to revise the assessment process to address the issues outlined above, and to evaluate any revisions after they are implemented. The work to revise and evaluate the assessment process should involve stakeholders, including the teachers' unions and teachers, and all changes should be clearly communicated to the education sector to increase the likelihood that the process will be accepted as valid and reliable. The assessment should be based on performance measures that teachers consider to be fair and accurate, which could include common professional teaching standards, and should provide incentives for behaviour that supports the overall goals of the education system (OECD, 2009).

Romania could also consider expanding the types of rewards available to teachers. For example, teachers in Romania reported to the review team that they would like to be rewarded with professional learning opportunities. The ministry also currently has the legislated authority to award teachers a range of decorations, orders, medals and titles, which could be used to publicly champion teachers' efforts to increase the equity of the education system by supporting success for all students.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Teaching quality is critical to student achievement, and as such, the appraisal of teachers is also critically important, for both development and quality assurance purposes. Improving appraisal processes to support teachers' continuing professional learning and competency development, and providing teachers with greater opportunities to make use of their higher levels of knowledge and skills will benefit teachers, students, schools and the education system as a whole.

Stakeholder engagement is important to the success of the reforms discussed in this chapter. Above all, it is essential that teachers are involved in developing these reforms, not just because they can share valuable insights as educators, but also to ensure they feel a sense of ownership of the professional teaching standards, appraisal processes and career stages that will become integral parts of their profession.

### *Recommendations*

#### *3.1 Develop common professional teaching standards*

**3.1.1. Develop national teaching standards that define good teaching in Romania and guide appraisal criteria and processes and other aspects of teaching policy such as initial teacher education and professional development**. The teaching standards should be aligned to the strengthened learning standards that set out national goals for student learning (see Recommendation 2.1.1 in Chapter 2), so that appraisals support teachers to develop the teaching competencies that will enable achievement of the national learning goals.

**3.1.2. Establish a consultative forum that involves all relevant stakeholders to reach agreement on the development of the teaching standards**. Forum discussions could be led by a neutral facilitator and focused on agreement at a high level, and would help to encourage a debate about the types of competencies and attributes Romanian teachers should focus on developing.

**3.1.3. Consider establishing a professional self-regulatory body for teachers that is responsible for promoting and maintaining the teaching standards**, and which would help to strengthen the professional identity of the teaching workforce. Over time, as it becomes more established, this body could play a more direct role in shaping teaching policy and certification requirements.

#### *3.2. Make regular teacher appraisal more developmental to support improvements to teaching*

**3.2.1. End the high-stakes consequences of regular appraisal that hinder its developmental function.** Regular appraisal results should not be used to determine salary bonuses, and eligibility for career advancement should be based on a minimum threshold rather than requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals. These changes should be made as part of a broader reform to the career advancement appraisal (see Recommendation 3.4.2). For those teachers who do not pursue career advancement, the regular developmental appraisal could be balanced by the externality of a periodic appraisal for recertification to provide adequate quality assurance and accountability.

**3.2.2. Ensure that regular appraisals are conducted by appraisers familiar with a teachers' classroom practice and who have the experience to be able to provide quality feedback.** Principals and school-based appraisers should conduct the regular appraisals, as they are familiar with the teachers and their classroom practice. Appraisal should be focused on classroom observations and professional dialogue to identify and address teachers' developmental needs.

**3.2.3. Connect regular appraisal to teachers' professional development**. Add professional learning plans to the regular appraisal methodology to encourage teachers to identify their learning needs in consultation with their appraisers. The plans should outline a few techniques that teachers might employ in order to improve student engagement and learning, and the professional learning activities that will help them to make those changes. Providing greater opportunities for informal collaborative learning within schools and through peer networks will be important to support continuous professional development.

**3.2.4. Develop a standard response for underperformance.** The current lack of a standard process to address an unsatisfactory regular appraisal result means that weaknesses in teaching may not be addressed. Romania should set out a fair, step-by-step response to underperformance, which could include the development of an improvement plan, additional appraisals and ultimately dismissal if performance does not improve.

### *3.3. Improve the probation period and initial assessment of teachers*

**3.3.1. Establish a cadre of experienced teachers to conduct the inspection of beginning teachers for full certification and focus the inspection on classroom practice**. Experienced teachers would bring significant teaching expertise and knowledge to provide new teachers with useful feedback that is essential to their early professional development. They would also bring an independence and consistency to the inspection which CSIs cannot provide, and help resolve the conflict in roles that CSI inspectors have, by allowing the latter to focus on school support as this review recommends (see Recommendation 4.4.4 in Chapter 4).

**3.3.2. Revise the *definitivat* to assess the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum, and consider reducing its weight in the appraisal process**. The new teacher standards (see Recommendation 3.1.1) should guide the revision of the *definitivat* exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers need in the classroom. Romania might also consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the exam so that it is a better measure of teachers' competencies. In the future, Romania could reduce the weight of the exam in favour of a more authentic measure of teacher competencies, such as a performance-based inspection of new teachers in the classroom.

**3.3.3. Ensure that new teachers receive more support to develop professionally**. All new teachers should have a mentor, be closely monitored and receive regular feedback to develop their teaching competencies. The current teacher portfolio should be developed into a formative tool that includes evidence of new teachers' work with students, to be discussed with their principals and mentors and to encourage self-reflection.

**3.3.4. Improve initial teacher education so that new teachers are adequately prepared to teach**. Raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes by selecting candidates with the appropriate skills and strong motivation to teach. Ensure that programmes prepare teachers in the new learner-centred curriculum and provide them with sufficient practical preparation in instructional practice and assessment. Progressively introduce the new Masters of Arts in teaching programme, ensuring that institutions have the capacity to meet its quality requirements and that the impact on teacher preparedness is evaluated before it is made mandatory.

### *3.4 Reward and incentivise teachers' development of higher competency levels*

**3.4.1. Revise the teaching career path so that teachers are motivated to develop competencies and take on new roles and responsibilities throughout their career**. The new career path should be guided by teacher standards that relate to the different stages of a teacher's career (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), with each stage associated with new responsibilities. New salary levels should also be defined to reflect the different stages and responsibilities of the career path.

**3.4.2. Revise appraisal for career advancement to focus on authentic measures of teaching practice rather than examinations and academic requirements**. Base the appraisal for career advancement on authentic measures of teacher competency, including classroom observations, and incorporate input from in-school appraisers who conduct the regular appraisal process. Use the same cadre of experienced teachers who will conduct new teachers' appraisals to conduct career advancement appraisals.

**3.4.3 Revise and consider ending the merit grade salary bonus which does not provide a fair and equitable measure of teaching**. Instead, new teacher career paths should be developed to recognise and reward teachers as they develop professionally and take on new roles and responsibilities, which offer higher remuneration. Romania should also consider instituting a general increase to teachers' salaries to attract top candidates to the profession and sufficiently remunerate teachers.

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# *Chapter 4*

# School evaluation in Romania: From compliance to school improvement

*In most countries, school evaluation is associated with accountability and improvement. However, in Romania, it is heavily weighted towards external accountability and compliance. This chapter sets out how school evaluation can be re-balanced to support school improvement. First, Romania needs a coherent system for school evaluation, with a single primary external evaluator and a single set of criteria for evaluations. Second, external evaluations should result in detailed feedback and follow-up support that schools can use to lead improvements. Third, school self-evaluation needs to be reinforced and given greater prominence so that it is seen as a useful improvement tool and not a compliance check. Finally, school leaders need to be supported to become pedagogical leaders so that they can lead improvements to teaching and learning in their schools.*

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.

## Introduction

The quality of a country's education system depends on what happens in its schools. In Romania, while learning standards have improved in recent years, a large share of students continue to have difficulty mastering basic skills, and an increasing share leave school early. School evaluation can help to address these challenges by focusing attention on the structures and processes in schools that influence student learning and how they can be improved.

Internationally, there has been a discernible shift in recent years in the nature and focus of school evaluation practices. In many OECD countries, this has entailed a move away from an emphasis on evaluating school compliance with national policies and procedures towards a greater focus on the quality of the teaching and learning process. In parallel, countries have placed much greater focus on the need for schools to evaluate themselves as part of efforts to strengthen school leadership for improvement, while retaining external controls to provide important quality assurance and support for schools' internal processes (OECD, 2013b). Quality standards and performance measures have evolved too, to address more directly the central importance of teaching and learning practices to student outcomes. While evaluation practices continue to vary considerably across countries, depending on the maturity of the evaluation system and the wider political-cultural context, a strong focus on enabling school-led improvement is increasingly seen as the hallmark of a strong school evaluation system.

Romania has taken steps to reorient school evaluation away from a focus on compliance towards improvement. Several features of the current evaluation system, however, stand in the way of progress. First, Romania lacks a shared definition of school quality to guide evaluation and improvement efforts. Second, responsibility for external evaluation is fragmented, which means that schools in Romania are subject to multiple evaluations. Third is the lack of feedback, particularly for struggling schools, which may not receive the feedback they need to improve. Fourth, despite recent efforts, school self-evaluation has not taken root as a meaningful developmental process, in part because of limited capacity and understanding, but also because of schools' weak autonomy in a system that remains highly centralised and focused on control. Finally, a number of factors prevent principals and inspectors from serving as the strong agents of improvement that they could be. Addressing these issues will be critical to establish a modern evaluation system in Romania that drives change in schools and improves outcomes for all students.

## Context and main features of school evaluation in Romania

### *The framework for school evaluation*

The 2005 Quality Assurance Law provides the basis for the current school evaluation system in Romania. It sets out the responsibilities of external and internal school evaluators for the pre-university and tertiary education systems. The law was intended to reinforce previous efforts to develop school evaluation which had begun in the late 1990s as Romania moved to decentralise its education system. Notably, it created the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), a permanent external school evaluation body separate from the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR), with its own legal status and budget. ARACIP replaced a

previous temporary national commission for evaluation in the ministry which only covered private schools. The creation of ARACIP was a positive move. Internationally, establishing an inspectorate of this type is a common approach to focusing efforts on school evaluation within a single independent organisation and developing expertise in that area (OECD, 2013b).

The Quality Assurance Law was a step forward for Romania in other ways as well. It introduced new external and internal school evaluation requirements, formalising processes that had only been piloted previously. The law aims to ensure that all schools meet a minimum level of quality by requiring them to be regularly evaluated, first for accreditation and then every five years after that. It also encouraged schools to continuously improve and be accountable to their local communities by requiring them to conduct annual self-evaluations and report publicly on their results. However, the law was drafted and put in place quickly, with limited communication across the education system about the purpose and benefits of ARACIP and school evaluations (Kiss and Fejes, 2010).

The 2005 Law does mention the two other external school evaluation bodies - the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) and MNESR. However, it only states that these bodies exert "quality control in pre-university education" according to methodologies specified elsewhere, and that MNESR, in particular, controls and implements measures to improve education quality as recommended by ARACIP (MNESR, 2006). At the same time, the CSIs and MNESR Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate continue to be governed by a large number of other laws, ministerial orders and decisions. The presence of these different legal frameworks, without any clear attempt to set out how the different external evaluation bodies relate to each other, has created overlap in their duties, which has not been resolved.

### *Responsibilities for school evaluation*

Romania is distinguished by the number of organisations involved in school evaluation. In addition to ARACIP, the MNESR evaluates schools through its local representatives, the CSIs, and through its own Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate. The different organisations' responsibilities duplicate each other in places.

#### *The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education*

ARACIP is responsible for developing national quality standards and performance indicators for all schools, and evaluating schools against these standards. Some of ARACIP's responsibilities also have a developmental function. These include providing guidelines and a template for school self-evaluation, as well as recommending quality improvements to the government based on its regular analysis of the education system (MNESR, 2006).

Like inspectorates in some other European countries, ARACIP contracts out its external school evaluations to evaluators with teaching experience (European Commission, 2015a). Evaluators must be qualified teachers with experience in evaluation and, once selected, they follow an 89-hour training programme. ARACIP was originally granted 50 staff positions by MNESR in 2005, but this has been reduced to 20. Today, it employs only 14 staff members, with just 6 working on accreditation and external evaluation, and lacks financial resources (ARACIP, 2014a).

### *County School Inspectorates*

The CSIs in Bucharest and Romania's 41 counties are deconcentrated arms of the MNESR, with responsibility for controlling quality in the school system. They are expected to apply and control the implementation of education policies in schools and monitor the quality of schools' teaching and learning activities. Each inspectorate is led by a general and a deputy general school inspector. In addition to these positions, the CSIs employ individuals responsible for the economic and technical administration of the inspectorate (e.g. accounting, payroll, IT, law), and two types of inspectors:

- **Inspectors responsible for curriculum and school inspection**. These inspectors conduct school inspections and specialty inspections of teachers (see Chapter 3). They inspect teaching and learning and focus their inspection efforts on specific areas related to their own teaching background in a particular education level (e.g. pre-school; primary) or curriculum subject. Their responsibilities include monitoring and controlling teachers' activities to ensure they comply with requirements, providing advice to teachers, and overseeing the implementation of exams and school competitions (MNESR, 2015).
- **Inspectors responsible for management.** These roles include institutional management inspectors, who appraise and advise principals and conduct school inspections, focusing their inspection efforts on the management of the school. They also include inspectors who do not necessarily conduct school inspections but instead plan and monitor activities related to particular portfolios, like human resource management and development, national minorities, continuing education, education projects and extracurricular activities (MNESR, 2015).

There were approximately 1 100 CSI inspectors overall nationally in 2011. A brief review of the organisational structure of the CSI inspectorate in two counties suggests that the distribution of inspectors is heavily weighted towards the curriculum and school inspection area. Inspectors are not necessarily distributed in proportion to the number of schools, teachers or school support required - a larger county like Binar might have only slightly more CSI staff (42) than smaller counties like Alba (39) (World Bank, 2011).

Romania has made efforts to transfer some responsibilities from the CSIs to schools, most notably with the 2011 Education Law, which granted authority for the hiring of teachers and principals to schools. However, over the years, these responsibilities have been recentralised. As a result, CSIs have considerable authority over the schools in their county.

All inspectors who work within a CSI are qualified teachers with at least eight years of teaching experience, positive annual appraisal results and didactic grade qualifications, signifying teaching excellence (see Chapter 3) (Eurydice, 2012). They must complete 60 credits of educational management courses (roughly 170 hours of study) to be eligible for a position as an inspector, but once in the role, they have limited professional development opportunities to allow them to build capacity (MNESR, 2016a).

The inspectorates have historically been influenced by politics, which has implications for their ability to fairly and consistently fulfil their tasks. The ministry appoints the CSI heads, the general and deputy general school inspectors. Political changes at the national level have resulted in high turnover in these roles; turnover for political reasons is also an issue among inspectors who work below the management level (World Bank, 2010). To address this, the 2011 Education Law established new transparent hiring procedures for inspectors. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that a significant proportion of Romania's counties boycotted these new

procedures when contests for general and deputy inspector positions were organised in 2015. However in autumn 2016, open contests were held in all counties for the first time.

CSIs are expected to support schools, but the majority of their legislated tasks relate to monitoring and controlling their activity (MNESR, 2011a). The lack of clarity in legislation and the volume of Minister's Orders and legislative items relating to the CSI inspectors may also make their role in terms of support to schools unclear. In practice, the activities of inspectors are weighted towards ensuring schools' compliance with rules and regulations, responding to requests for information from the ministry and inspecting teachers during their probation and for career progression (World Bank, 2010). CSIs are also constrained by a lack of finances and insufficient staff numbers to conduct all the school and teacher inspections that they are required to perform (World Bank, 2010).

### *Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate*

The Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate of the MNESR conducts direct inspections of schools. These inspections reportedly provide a means for the ministry to quickly investigate issues that arise in the education system, such as recent lower than average baccalaureate results, and to maintain a connection with the delivery of education on the ground. For a brief period, from the mid-2000s to 2011, it stopped conducting these inspections, but this responsibility has since been reinstated. The reasons for this change in the ministry's role were reportedly complex, and likely reflected changes in successive governments' attitudes towards the decentralisation of the education system and the role different actors should play in monitoring the country's schools. MNESR inspectors have similar teaching backgrounds to their CSI counterparts. Each inspector is focused on particular areas of the curriculum or level of the school education system (Eurydice, 2012).

The directorate also maintains a relationship with the CSIs. It organises meetings with CSI inspectors before the start of each school year, and each CSI is required to submit an annual report on their activities and respond to requests for information from the ministry (MNESR, 2016a). However, a general lack of oversight and accountability are evident in the relationship between the central ministry and its decentralised arms. For example, the ministry is supposed to conduct regular appraisals of general school inspectors, but it was indicated to the OECD review team during interviews that this is reportedly not happening. In addition, recent research (World Bank, 2010) points to disparities in how different CSIs envision and implement their roles across the country, which suggests that they are provided with limited guidance and direction.

### *Schools*

The Quality Assurance Law made school self-evaluation compulsory for the first time. Schools are required to form a Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, which evaluates the school annually using ARACIP's standards and produces an annual improvement report, the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation. Each commission has between six to eight members, with representatives from the teaching staff, the teachers' union, parents, students at the upper secondary level, the local council and national minorities (MNESR, 2006). Commission members are not required to do any training, and their participation in this is left to the discretion of the school. Although the commission is responsible for implementing school improvement measures, in addition to conducting internal reviews, in reality, schools in Romania lack the autonomy and finances to effect change. The commission operates alongside a large number of other governance bodies that exist within Romania's schools ( Box 4.1).

### Box 4.1. School governance in Romania

The 2011 Education Law made schools publicly responsible for their performance, as embodied in the form of the board of directors (school board) and the principal.

The **school board** is responsible for the management of the school. It includes teaching staff, including the principal and deputy principal(s); representatives of the mayor and the local council; and parent representatives. It validates the school's self-evaluation report, the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation, promotes improvement measures, and approves the school's strategic planning documents, budget plans and curriculum.

The **principal** ensures the executive management of the school, and as such, legally represents the school and manages its budget. Principals develop the organisational, operational and budgetary plans for their schools, and submit them to the school board for approval. They are also responsible for assessing, training and motivating staff. They may be supported by one or more deputy principals.

Schools are legally required to maintain seven compulsory commissions. This includes the **Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation,** that conducts annual self-evaluation according to ARACIP's standards and produces the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation, as well as other commissions with specific mandates for the curriculum, continuous training and professional development, and combating school violence, absenteeism and school dropout.

In addition to these seven commissions, each school is also required to maintain :

- The **Teachers' Council** - led by the principal and including all teaching staff. It is responsible for the quality of teaching, proposes professional development plans and validates teachers' self-evaluations; and
- **Methodical commissions** - include all teachers of a particular curriculum subject or group of classes, and deal with a range of teaching and learning matters

The 2011 Education Law requires the school board and the principal to cooperate with the Teachers' Council, Parents' Committee and local government.

*Source*: MNESR (2016b), "Ordin privind aprobarea Regulamentului-cadru de organizare şi funcţionare a unităţilor de învăţământ preuniversitar" [Order approving the Regulation for organising and functioning of pre-university institutions], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest; MNESR (2011a), "Legea educaţiei naţionale" [Law of National Education], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest.

Principals in Romania are considered to be directly responsible for the quality of education in the school, yet they do not have a designated role in the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation and they do not co-ordinate the self-evaluation process (MNESR, 2006). Overall, the school leadership role is under developed in Romania, with a lack of clarity on the main functions and accountability, limited relevant preparation and professional development opportunities, and no clear system for performance management (see Policy Issue 4.4). In addition, the lack of fair and transparent appointment procedures for principals have only recently been tackled; while this is a very positive step in terms of the transparency and stability of the post, the selection process does not yet seem to be well-designed to identify the aptitudes that are essential for school leadership. These conditions have not helped school leaders to play a meaningful role in school improvement.

Moreover, some principals in Romania are responsible for multiple schools, posing challenges for administration and school improvement. School optimisation efforts in the mid-2000s, which were intended to address a shrinking student population and reduce

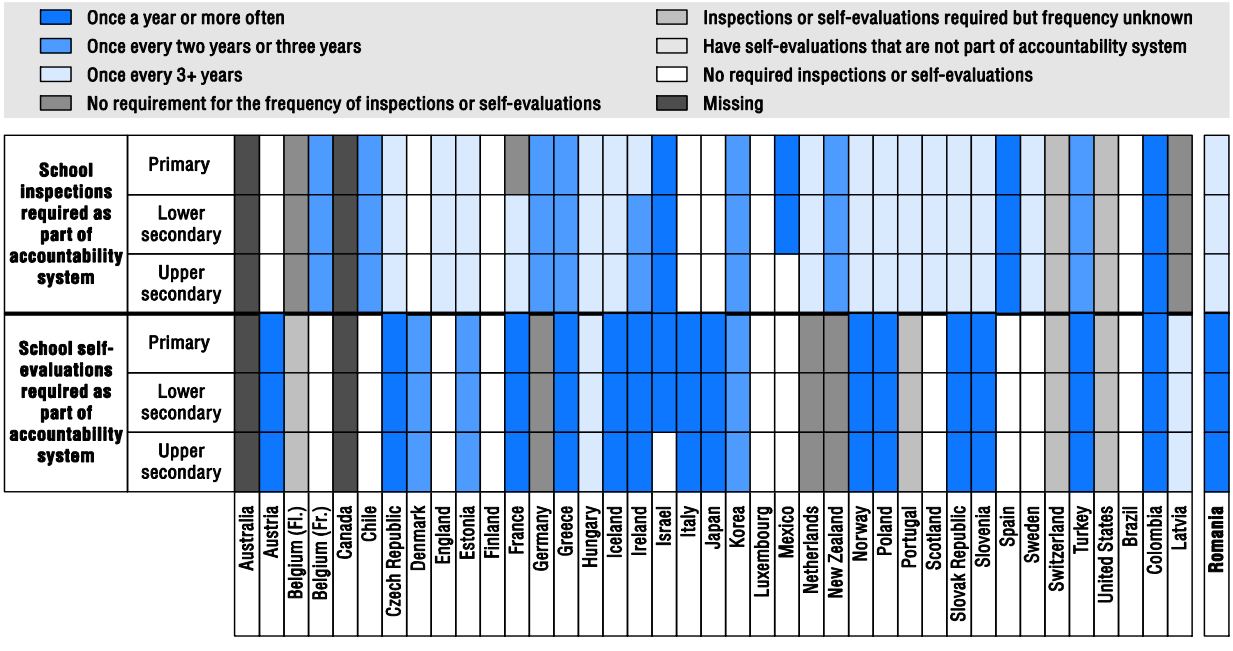
costs, led to schools with low student-teacher ratios being closed or becoming satellites (UNICEF/IES, 2014). Satellite schools lost their status as independent institutions, and instead now fall under the responsibility of a co-ordinating school and its principal. In the mid-1990s, there were 30 000 schools in Romania (Mediafax, 2013). By 2011, there were 7 000 schools which are independent legal entities, with approximately the same number of principals, and 14 000 satellite schools (World Bank, 2011). The needs of the satellite schools are not well understood, and they are more likely to lack funds (UNICEF/IES, 2014). As such, principals may lack the time, capacity and resources to contribute to effective improvement in satellite schools.

### *Types of school evaluation in Romania*

School evaluations commonly serve two related purposes: improvement and accountability (Faubert, 2009). School evaluations for improvement are generally formative and associated with self-evaluation. They aim to improve the teaching and learning in a school in order to bring about better student outcomes. School evaluations for accountability are generally summative and associated with external school evaluation. They aim to confirm compliance with rules and regulations and provide information to the public about whether or not a school meets quality standards. Countries need to balance accountability and improvement so that one does not outweigh the other. They must also ensure that external and internal school evaluations complement each other so that schools have a clear and consistent sense of what they need to do to improve and can take responsibility for their own development.

Romania uses both external inspections and school self-evaluations, which are conducted with similar regularity as in 6 other OECD and partner countries (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. School evaluations in public schools**




*Source*: Adapted from OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en. The information for Romania was provided through official documents and information through the country visits.

Romania's school evaluation processes are currently weighted more towards external accountability and compliance than development and improvement. Romania has multiple types of external school evaluation conducted by multiple evaluators, using different approaches and standards. While school self-evaluation is required across Romania to support improvements in the learning and teaching environment, it does not seem to be viewed as a meaningful improvement exercise by schools.

### *ARACIP evaluations*

ARACIP evaluates schools using the quality standards it has developed. Following its evaluation ARACIP recommends to the ministry whether a school should be granted provisional authorisation, initial accreditation or recurrent evaluation:

- **Provisional authorisation:** grants new schools or schools with new programmes of study the right to begin hiring staff, accepting students and delivering education. This status lasts for two to four years.
- **Initial accreditation:** allows schools to issue diplomas or certificates, and to have all the rights of other pre-university education providers. This status lasts for five years.
- **Recurrent evaluation:** signifies that a school has met the standards to continue operating for a period of five years.

Schools that do not meet the standards cannot open or begin delivering a new programme. In the case of recurrent accreditation they may be closed, after receiving warnings and being subject to additional evaluations.

When ARACIP was first established, all schools legally operating at that time were automatically accredited (MNESR, 2006), with the obligation to undergo an evaluation for recurrent accreditation against ARACIP's standards in the future. These evaluations began in 2011/12 (Table 4.1). By 2017, ARACIP plans to conduct recurrent evaluations of all the remaining 4 000 public and private schools in the country. As such, recurrent evaluations now constitute the majority of the agency's school evaluations.

**Table 4.1. ARACIP's recurrent evaluations**

| Year | Numberofschoolsevaluated |
|---|---|
| **2011/12** | 1023 |
| **2012/13** | 20 |
| **2013/14** | 132 |
| **2014/15** | 1785 |

*Source*: Communications with ARACIP, 2016

ARACIP uses general (minimum) standards to evaluate schools for initial accreditation. For recurrent accreditation it uses both the general standards and reference (higher-quality) standards to evaluate schools. The standards include 43 performance indicators, each associated with multiple descriptor statements describing what the school needs to demonstrate. The performance indicators are the same for both the general and reference standards, but the descriptor statements are different and those for recurrent accreditation provide higher expectations of quality for schools. The standards fall under three broad domains: institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management (Table 4.2).

ARACIP's recurrent evaluations involve a review of the school's documents, notably its self-evaluation report, followed by a two to five day school visit by two to four evaluators. The visit includes reviews of additional documents, classroom observations, interviews with teachers and the principal, and interviews or questionnaires with the student and parent committees. At the conclusion of the visit, the inspectors write a note in the school's Special Register for Inspection, identifying any problems, and a deadline for improvement. The school's demonstration of each descriptor is rated on a scale from unsatisfactory to excellent. The full evaluation reports are made publicly available on the ARACIP website. If the recurrent evaluation found that the required standards have been met, ARACIP issues a "quality certificate" to the school (MNESR, 2016a).

When ARACIP's evaluations were first developed, the primary aim was to ensure that schools met minimum standards of institutional capacity, including their facilities and compliance with legislation. To date, ARACIP's evaluations have not included lengthy school visits, nor have they been considered developmental. They do not result in detailed feedback (e.g. recommendations) intended to support school improvement, and follow-up with schools to assess their progress has not been a standard part of the process.

ARACIP is currently revising its standards to address some of these limitations. The new standards are intended to focus equally on institutional capacity, quality management (i.e. the school's self-evaluation procedures) and educational effectiveness. They will encompass certain areas that ARACIP has identified as essential, such as the extent to which schools address and improve the learning outcomes of all students, students with special education needs and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (ARACIP, 2016). The revised standards are also intended to be more stringent by increasing the number of descriptors a school must fulfil in order to receive "good" or "excellent" ratings. ARACIP has also revised the methodology of its school evaluations to ensure that evaluators spend more time visiting schools and observing classes and less time reviewing paperwork. These revisions suggest that ARACIP's evaluations are moving in a more developmental direction to better support school improvement but it will be important to ensure that the number of indicators and descriptors schools are required to meet are feasible and effective for school improvement. ARACIP is planning to release the new standards in 2018.

### *CSI inspections*

The CSIs conduct two different types of school inspections:

- **general school inspections:** to evaluate a school's overall performance
- **thematic inspections:** brief reviews of one or more areas of a school's activity, including special thematic inspections, which review teaching activity

CSIs also continually monitor schools and may intervene to provide guidance in response to complaints from parents or concerns (for example in response to the ministry's national ranking of schools based on student results). CSIs also visit schools to conduct specialty inspections of teachers (see Chapter 3).

### *General school inspections*

CSI inspections are conducted at least every four to five years, as resources allow. Each CSI determines when a school should be inspected based on factors such as the time since the last inspection and whether there are any concerns about the school. As such, school

inspection schedules are not based on consistent criteria, and schools within a county may not be inspected on a regular basis. The inspection lasts one to two weeks. It is conducted by a team of two to eight CSI inspectors, including curriculum and school inspectors, who have expertise in a particular curriculum subject or level of schooling, and educational management inspectors, who focus on school leadership (MNESR, 2011b). Inspectors review documentation provided by the school and then conduct a school visit. Sixty percent of the visit is spent on classroom observations, 20% on discussions with teachers, and 20% on discussions with school management, meetings with students and parents, and analysing additional documents.

Schools are inspected in seven theme areas, which overlap with some of the ARACIP evaluation domains (Table 4.2). The current frameworks have some important gaps. For example, although they reference the need for schools to take inclusive education principles and equity into account in their practices, there is no established practice across the counties to do so. At the same time, the outcomes of disadvantaged or minority students or students with special education needs, measured in terms of their performance in national examinations and assessments, and classroom assessments, dropout and repetition rates are not systematically taken into account. Finally, neither framework analyses contextual factors that affect student outcomes, which would provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of school quality (see Policy Issue 4.1).

**Table 4.2. Areas evaluated in Romania's school evaluations**

| ARACIPandschoolself -evaluations | MinistryandCSIgeneralschoolinspections |
|---|---|
| **Institutionalcapacity**<br>• institutional,administrativeandmanagerialstructures(including communicationwithparentsandthecommunity)<br>• physical resources(logisticsandinfrastructure)<br>• humanresources | • schoolmanagement,qualitymanagement,developmentofthe institution,efficientusageof(human,financial,materialand information)resources,compliancewithlegislationand regulations<br>• therelat ionshipoftheschoolwithparentsandthelocal community |
| **Educationalefficiency(oreffectiveness)**<br>• thecontentofthestudyprogrammes<br>• students' learning outcomes<br>• teachers' scientific research or methodological activity<br>• thefinancialactivityoftheorganisation | • theapplicationofnational/specificcurriculum,andthequalityof extracurricularactivities<br>• teachers' activities (i.e. planning; teaching-learning-assessing; usingadifferentiatedapproach)<br>• students' performancecomparedtonationalstandards |
| **Qualitymanagement**<br>• qualityassurancestrategiesandprocedures<br>• proceduresforinitiating,monitoringandperiodicallyreviewingachieved programmesandactivities<br>• objectiveandtransparentproceduresforassessing students' learning outcomes<br>• proceduresfortheperiodicevaluationofteachingstaff<br>• availabilityofadequatelearningresources<br>• regularupdatingofthedatabaseregardinginternalqualityassurance | • how the school supports and encourages students' personal developmentandmotivationtolearn(counselling,educational guidance,individualisedassistance),respectingtheprinciples ofinclusiveeducationandprovidingequalopportunities<br>• students' attitude towards the education provided by the school |

*Sources*:MNESR(2006),"Legea 87/2006 pentru aprobarea Ordonanței de urgență a Guvernului nr. 75/2005 privind asigurarea calității în învățământ" [Law 87/2006 for the Endorsement of the Government's Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 Concerning Quality Assurance in Education]; MNESR (2007), "H.G. nr. 22 din 10/01/2007 pentru aprobarea Metodologiei de evaluare instituțională în vederea autorizării, acreditării și evaluării periodice a organizațiilor furnizoare de educație, publicată în M.O., Partea I nr. 59 din 25/01/2007" [Minister's Decision 22 / 2007 approving the Methodology of institutional evaluation for authorisation, accreditation and evaluation of providers of education], Ministry of National Education and Research, Bucharest; MNESR (2011b), "Ordinul 5547 din 6 octombrie 2011 privind aprobarea Regulamentului de inspectie a unitatilor de invatamant preuniversitar"[Minister's Order 5547 / 2011, Methodology and Regulation for Pre-university School Inspections], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest.

Inspectors produce a final report with their observations, recommendations and a grade (poor, acceptable, good) for each area inspected and for each group of teachers, by subject area. The principal presents the summary of the important information to the teachers' council and parent and student representatives. It is provided to the local government only upon request. In most OECD countries, school inspection reports are either automatically shared with education authorities or posted publicly to ensure accountability (OECD, 2015a). Adopting a similarly transparent approach in Romania would help to strengthen integrity in the education system.

All schools are required to produce an improvement plan in response to the CSI inspection. Schools where problems are evident are subject to a follow-up inspection. If the CSI determines that the school cannot meet the objectives in their improvement plan, it may ask ARACIP to conduct an evaluation.

### *Thematic inspections*

CSIs also conduct thematic inspections, which are brief reviews of documents or observations of the activity of school staff based on themes set out in the relevant minister's order or themes they deem important, such as compliance with legislation and the work of school commissions. Thematic inspections of some documents, such as the school's annual management plan, appear to be conducted annually. The CSI report following the inspection sets out findings and areas that require improvement. The findings may be shared with the ministry but they are otherwise not disseminated.

### *Ministry inspections*

The MNESR's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate conducts general school inspections and thematic inspections of a sample of schools each year. These inspections follow the same methodology used by the CSIs, with a few notable differences. These include the fact that the directorate's inspections result in recommendations for both schools and the ministry, and its general school inspections lead to post-inspection follow-up with all evaluated schools, rather than just those where problems were evident. Otherwise, the directorate appears to duplicate the inspection efforts of the CSIs.

The directorate may decide to conduct general inspections of schools that meet certain criteria (e.g. schools with results above or below the national average). Given that these inspections are more time consuming than thematic inspections, the directorate tends to conduct fewer of them. For example, in 2013/14, it inspected 266 schools in 22 counties, of which the vast majority were speciality and thematic inspections, with only two general school inspections (MNESR, 2014). A recent round of thematic inspections evaluated how schools were preparing for students' mock examinations.

### *School self-evaluation*

The 2005 Quality Assurance Law broadly describes schools' responsibilities for self-evaluation. Each school's Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation assess their school based on the same standards that ARACIP use for their external evaluations. The school commission is required to gather information from staff and stakeholders (e.g. questionnaires of parents and students) and to address any descriptors identified by an external ARACIP evaluation as being "unsatisfactory" or unfulfilled (European Commission, 2015a).

Based on this assessment, the commission develops proposals for school improvement activities, and completes the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation presenting the self-evaluation results. The teachers' council, parents' association and student council debate the report, which is validated by the school board and then submitted to ARACIP. Reports are made publicly available on ARACIP's website which also provides information about all external school evaluations and ARACIP's periodic reports to the government on the quality of education.

### *Use of results*

In Romania, perceptions of school performance are influenced more by students' results on examinations or competitions than school evaluations. ARACIP's external school evaluations determine whether a school can continue to operate. Otherwise, the extent to which external and internal school evaluations are used varies but appears to be limited.

#### *Policy making by the ministry*

There is no evidence that the results of school evaluations inform national policies or the ministry's decisions about funding and support to schools (MNESR, 2016a). ARACIP reviews the results of its school evaluations and school self-evaluations to make recommendations for policies or practices at the national, regional and school level, but they do not appear to have an impact on policy development or decision making.

#### *Public reporting on the performance of the school system*

The results from school evaluations are not reflected in ministry's public reporting on the performance of the school system. The Ministry publishes a ranking of high schools nationally based on students' results when they entered the school in the national examination in Grade 8 (*Admitere*, 2016). In 2009, ARACIP began developing a contextualised attainment model it calls an "efficiency index", which is intended to provide a fairer picture of student (and school) performance than the national ranking by indicating whether a school is achieving better results than other schools functioning under similar conditions with similar resources (see Box 5.2, Chapter 5). The index calculates a school's performance based on its resources, risk factors (e.g. the socio-economic status of the school area; the percentage of qualified teachers) and outcomes (e.g. the distribution of average marks at the end of the school year; student results on standardised exams) (ARACIP, 2016). At present an index has been calculated for a sample of schools at all levels - kindergartens, primary, gymnasium and high school. These schools receive a form showing their performance against the index's criteria, but the index currently plays no formal role in the school evaluation process.

#### *Performance management by the County School Inspectorates*

The CSIs' monitoring of schools' performance, including sanctions imposed on schools, appears to be influenced by raw national exam results rather than the results of school evaluations. The CSIs do not appear to take ARACIP's external school evaluation findings into account, and it is not clear how far they make use of schools' own self-evaluation results.

### *School improvement*

Schools are required to develop improvement plans based on the results of CSI and ministry inspections, and ARACIP research has found encouraging evidence that schools subject to its external evaluations improved their performance (ARACIP, 2014b). However, in general, external and internal school evaluations are perceived to have minimal impact on teaching and learning practices in schools (MNESR, 2016a).

One reason for this seems to be the limited connection between the internal and external evaluation processes and schools' improvement plans and activities. In one school, it was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that the self-evaluation results had informed the development of school improvement activities. However, the review team's discussions with other stakeholders suggested that schools view the main purpose of self-evaluation to be to complete the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluations, rather than to improve the school.

## Policy issues

Romania has made significant investments in school evaluation since the late 1990s. The country now has an independent school evaluation body, clear and transparent external evaluation procedures, and self-evaluation is a requirement in all schools. Romania is now in a position to review and revise its school evaluation system to make it a more effective tool for school and system-wide improvement. This will mean aligning its external evaluation processes and strengthening the capacity of schools to conduct self-evaluations and respond to their evaluation results with effective development measures, paying particular attention to the schools that need the most support to improve. It will also mean ensuring that the best candidates become principals and school inspectors at the county level, and that their roles are further developed to support school improvement. These changes will help external and internal school evaluations to focus on the areas that matter for improving the quality and equity of an education system: the teaching and learning practices in the school and the outcomes for all students.

## Policy Issue 4.1: Establishing a common framework for school evaluation

Romania now has in place external school evaluation procedures to ensure all schools in the country meet certain minimum standards, which is an important quality assurance measure. However, it has three different external school evaluation bodies using different criteria to conduct their own evaluations which is inefficient and undermines their effectiveness. Developing a common definition of a good school would help Romania to integrate the efforts of these bodies so that they are all working together to support schools to reach higher standards, and ensure that everyone shares a common understanding of what these are.

### ***Developing a shared definition of a "good school"***

School evaluation is most effective when informed by a nationally recognised definition of a "good school" (OECD, 2013b; Box 4.2). A common definition promotes consistency among evaluators, ensures all schools understand what they will be measured against and provides a model to which schools can aspire. It can also reinforce the government's education priorities, by highlighting the implications of national goals at the school level. The definition and related criteria should be based on national evidence, data and research, and be reviewed periodically.

At present, Romania has two legislated school evaluation frameworks, which present different but overlapping criteria for school quality. This puts schools in the difficult position of having to meet separate expectations rather than being able to focus on one set of standards to help guide their improvement efforts. Both evaluation frameworks also reveal significant gaps, with the result that important dimensions of teaching and learning might receive insufficient attention, undermining the fairness and reliability of any assessment of school performance. Creating a single, common definition of a "good school" would not only bring coherence to Romania's school evaluation system, but also ensure external and internal evaluation processes pay adequate attention to the full range of elements that contribute to and comprise good schooling.

### *Gaps and inconsistencies in the school evaluation frameworks*

Romania has two frameworks for school evaluation: 1) the general and reference standards used for ARACIP evaluations and school self-evaluations; and 2) the evaluation criteria used for the CSI and the MNESR's general school inspections. While the two frameworks seem to overlap (see Table 4.2), in practice the ARACIP and CSI evaluations focus on different dimensions of school quality, and both neglect important factors that are recommended for effective school evaluation: student outcomes and contextual factors, school self-evaluation (CSI/MNESR), and teaching and learning processes (ARACIP).

**Box 4.2. What is a "good school"?**

Internationally, definitions of a good or effective school tend to cover the following elements:

- the quality of teaching and learning
- the rate of students' progress and outcomes, and the equity of their results, given contextual factors like students' social background
- how teachers are developed to become more effective throughout their careers
- the application of the curriculum
- the use of assessment for learning (i.e. formative assessment to inform adjustments to teaching and learning strategies)
- the quality of the instructional leadership in the school
- the school's vision and expectations
- the school's self-evaluation practices and the extent to which they focus on teaching and learning.

*Source*: OECD (2013b), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

The first important gap in both frameworks concerns student outcomes. To support school improvement, it is important to have measurable performance indicators on the quality of a school's teaching and learning and their impact on student outcomes (Faubert, 2009). Measurement of student outcomes should go beyond their results on standardised tests to include such outcomes as well-being and acquisition of higher-order thinking skills (Faubert, 2009). In Romania, neither framework effectively addresses a range of both cognitive and non-cognitive quantitative and qualitative student outcomes.

In addition, neither takes into account contextual factors that affect student outcomes such as socio-economic status or parental education levels. Omitting these risks measuring the quality of a school's student intake rather than meaningfully evaluating the quality of the school (OECD, 2013b). It increases the likelihood that schools in advantaged areas will be evaluated as performing well and those in disadvantaged areas will not. The frameworks do not include outcomes for particular minority student groups, which would allow the system to better assess equity and inclusiveness.

An important gap in the CSI/MNESR inspection framework is any consideration of schools' self-evaluation processes, which is notable given that the ministry and the CSIs have a mandate to support school improvement. Conversely, the ARACIP's evaluation framework does not focus adequately on assessing the quality of teaching and learning processes. This is in line with the view of some educators in Romania who expressed concerns that the ARACIP evaluations are mainly compliance checks, with reviews of documentation taking precedence over classroom observations. The new ARACIP standards are currently being revised to focus more on teaching and learning.

### *Developing a common definition, new criteria and methodology*

There is a clear need for a single and holistic vision of a good school in Romania, to guide evaluation and improvement efforts. The ARACIP review presents an opportunity to do this, as ARACIP has the mandate, independence and expertise to develop a robust set of standards and indicators. In developing this, the following aspects should be taken into account:

- **ARACIP should lead an inclusive review process**. This will help to develop collective ownership for the new definition, standards and school evaluation itself. This is especially important given the weak support for the current ARACIP framework among many educators in Romania. The development of a common definition of a good school and associated standards for evaluation could form part of the national, public consultation on education, "Educated Romania" (see Chapter 5). Communicating and promoting the new definition and standards among Romania's educators will also be critical to ensure that it is used, and contributes positively to school improvement (see Policy Issues 4.2 and 4.3).
- **The new definition of a good school should link to national priorities**. These include priorities around quality and equity, and addressing the current gaps in the framework. Particular attention should be paid to the quality of teaching and learning processes and their relationship to student outcomes, taking the school's context into account to provide a fair and accurate picture of students' development (OECD, 2013b). ARACIP's membership of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates could provide valuable opportunities to draw on international experience and research on effective schools to inform this work.
- **School evaluation should be guided by a small set of high-quality standards and associated indicators**. Too many, complicated standards risk generating confusion and a heavy administrative burden for both schools and evaluators. As such, it will be of paramount importance to ensure that standards and indicators are not lengthy and complicated and, instead, help schools focus on the key issues for school improvement (see above). The Scottish framework for school evaluation uses just three main questions and associated indicators, focused on the simple question "how good is our school?" (Box 4.3).

**Box 4.3. Evaluating schools in Scotland (United Kingdom)**

In the early 1990s, Scotland began developing indicators for school evaluation. Over the course of two decades, based on feedback and examinations of how the most effective schools were evaluating themselves, these indicators were pared down to the most essential.

The current school evaluation framework of Education Scotland, the government agency responsible for conducting school inspections, is used for both external and internal school evaluations and is intended to help evaluators answer the question: how good is our school? The framework focuses on three key questions and associated indicators, and for each indicator, identifies school practices that are considered highly effective:

1. How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?
2. Performance indicators include: the school's capacity for self-evaluation for self-improvement; school leadership and management of staff; management of resources to promote equity.
3. How good is the quality of care and education we offer?
4. Performance indicators include: learning, teaching and assessment; the curriculum; personalised support for students; and engaging families in learning.
5. How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?
6. Performance indicators include: improving well-being, equality and inclusion; raising attainment and achievement; and increasing creativity and employability.

*Sources*: Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en;
Education Scotland (2015), *How Good is Our School?* 4th edition, Education Scotland, Livingston, https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2_HGIOS4.pdf.

- **Fair and credible school evaluation should draw on multiple sources**. Evaluations should draw on multiple sources of evidence that combine data on school quality, document reviews, and feedback collected via stakeholder surveys and interviews, and classroom observation of teaching and learning (OECD, 2013b). While school evaluation in Romania does use these sources, classroom observations play a limited role in ARACIP evaluations. Strengthening this aspect will be important to ensure that its evaluations provide an accurate measure of the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and to enhance the evaluations' legitimacy among Romania's teachers.
- **Consider how school self-evaluation can be reinforced.** Other countries do this by ensuring that external evaluation interacts directly with self-evaluation, for example by including a review of the school's self-assessment reports and an assessment of its internal evaluation practices as part of external evaluations (OECD, 2013b).

Finally, the test of good school evaluation is that it guides and supports schools to improve. Gathering ongoing feedback from schools on the evaluation processes and the quality of support provided to them will provide insights into the effectiveness of the current evaluation process, and help to identify appropriate adjustments.

### *Revising and aligning the mandates of the external evaluation bodies*

The three external school evaluation bodies in Romania – the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate, the CSIs and ARACIP – currently operate in parallel, duplicating rather than building upon each other's efforts. The findings of the different bodies do not seem to inform each other's work. For example, there is no expectation that the CSIs will use the results of ARACIP evaluations in their county to inform their ongoing monitoring and support of schools. Romania will need to clarify the mandates of each body to eliminate inefficiencies and ensure that their work, individually and collectively, meaningfully supports school improvement.

#### *Establishing ARACIP as the main external school evaluator*

Several factors point to the value of giving ARACIP the primary role in setting standards and performing external school evaluations. It is a largely autonomous agency that focuses exclusively on school evaluation and has specialised expertise in both external and internal school evaluation. By recruiting and training all its evaluators to the same standard, it can ensure a level of consistency in evaluations across the education system. As a central body, it can maintain an objective distance from the schools it evaluates. It can also provide strong support from the centre by conducting system-wide research and disseminating effective school self-evaluation practices, tools and guidelines across the country.

To be effective as the primary external school evaluator, ARACIP will need to be sufficiently financed and staffed. Funding for the organisation has been inconsistent and has fallen in recent years, which ARACIP attributes to changes in the government (ARACIP, 2014a). ARACIP relies to a large extent on fees paid by local authorities for school evaluations, in addition to government grants and resources from international projects (ARACIP, 2014a). This is a problematic arrangement for both ARACIP and the local authorities, some of whom have difficulty paying the fee (Kiss and Fees, 2010).

Instead, providing ARACIP with government funding that is commensurate with its workload, and eliminating the need for it to charge a fee to local authorities, would be consistent with the way inspectorates are commonly funded in other European countries (van Bruges, 2010). This could also support equity by allowing ARACIP to prioritise evaluations of schools in areas of low socio-economic status, which are reportedly rarely visited, without having to wait for fees to be paid by the local authorities.

Given the recent decrease in ARACIP's internal staffing levels and the need to evaluate all public and private schools by 2017, an increase in ARACIP's staff allotment, which is determined by the government, would appear to be necessary. This should take place in conjunction with a review of the profile of the external evaluators that are contracted to ARACIP, which at present may not sufficiently reflect the backgrounds required to evaluate teaching and learning practices. Some stakeholders reported to the OECD review team in interviews that ARACIP external contracted evaluators' do not always have experience in the education level of the school they are evaluating. Internationally, candidates for school evaluator roles are generally required to have a teaching qualification in the school level they will be evaluating (Flaubert, 2009). Romania should consider implementing similar requirements and increasing the size of its evaluation teams to allow for more comprehensive evaluations, particularly in larger schools.

### *Focusing CSIs on school improvement*

There have been suggestions that Romania close the CSIs and delegate their responsibilities to ARACIP, in part, because of the overlap in their school evaluation practices. This review recommends that the CSIs should lose their current school evaluation role. External school evaluation requires that the evaluators have sufficient objectivity and distance from responsibility for a school's performance to avoid conflicts of interest and bias (OECD, 2013b). The current arrangements for CSIs in Romania mean that this cannot always be the case. CSIs work regularly with the teachers and schools in their counties, sometimes over a long period of time, enabling local relationships to develop. CSIs conduct some aspects of teacher appraisal in the schools in their counties, they are the employers of the teachers and principals, and they are ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of education in their county. All these features undermine their ability to consistently maintain the appropriate distance for external school evaluations.

Yet the closeness of CSIs to schools does make them well positioned to provide targeted, hands-on support to schools, which Romania clearly needs to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The presence of a strong supportive "mediating layer" between the government and schools is a key feature of education systems around the world that have experienced sustained improvements (Mushed et al., 2010). As such, it would be beneficial for the CSIs to be integrated into a new school evaluation paradigm in ways that make the best use of their supportive role, while ARACIP becomes the primary external evaluator.

In this role, CSIs would still have a supportive function in evaluation by continuing to monitor schools, but these activities would be informed by common standards, connected to the ARACIP evaluations and designed to support school self-evaluation. The ministry, the CSIs and ARACIP should work together and solicit input from schools to determine what format that monitoring should take; giving consideration to activities that would be necessary or add value for information gathering and guidance purposes. For example, it would probably be worthwhile for the CSIs to continue to conduct some form of thematic review to quickly collect information about schools' activities. Optimising the capacity of the CSIs to provide support to schools in this way will require redefining the inspector role (see Policy Issue 4.4).

### *Shifting the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate's role to delivery support*

There are inefficiencies inherent in a system where a central body maintains responsibility for directly inspecting schools if those inspections fall within the mandate of other organisations. Governments generally play a much more powerful, system-wide role in school improvement by establishing overall education priorities and developing policies to ensure their implementation (see for example, Box 4.4).

As such, rather than conducting direct inspections of schools, the MNESR's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate could change its role to proactively monitor and drive implementation of education policy, as research suggests that this is currently not happening (World Bank, 2010). The patchy implementation of education policy across the country, such as variation in teachers' preparedness to teach the new curriculum or in the use of tools such as education portfolios, suggest that there is an acute need for this kind of delivery support in Romania.

The reformed directorate would play a key role by working closely with CSIs to monitor national priorities and policies, and working with counties to develop appropriate interventions where delivery encounters challenges. This national perspective may also support peer learning across different counties, with the directorate having the perspective to identify what is working well in one county and help others to learn from its successes.

**Box 4.4. Working with subnational education bodies**

Internationally, governments have different methods for co-ordinating, supporting and overseeing the work of education bodies at the regional or local level:

- Holding regular meetings with the heads of the subnational bodies throughout the year to discuss progress against goals, share information and identify factors that are enabling or impeding school improvement.
- Requiring that education bodies conduct self-evaluations, setting a vision and school improvement goals for their district connected to national education priorities, and using regular reports to the government as the means to report on the results of their efforts (see Chapter 5).
- Establishing a system for the periodic external evaluation of the subnational education bodies, including the provision of recommendations and follow-up as needed, as is done by the Ministry of Education or the school inspectorate in Sweden, Korea, Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom).
- Providing standardised tools and templates to support the subnational education bodies in their work with schools.
- Encouraging networking between authorities with greater capacity and those that need more support in order to strengthen management across the sector.

*Sources*: Kim, K. et al. (2010), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Korea*, Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Seoul, www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy; Nusche, D. et al. (2011b), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116610-en; OECD (2013b), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en; Mazurkiewicz et al. (2014), Implementation of a new school supervision system in Poland", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 111, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrlxrxgc6b-en; Estyn (2015), *Improving Schools through Regional Education Consortia*, Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn), Cardiff,www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf.

## Policy Issue 4.2: Using evaluation results to better support school improvement

In order to bring about school improvement, Romania will need to ensure that the results of external school evaluations support not only external accountability but also school development. Evaluations for external accountability are associated with public reporting, rewards and sanctions while those for development are associated with feedback, follow-up and improvement planning (Faubert, 2009). By providing follow-up support that builds schools' self-evaluation capacity, Romania will ultimately be able to rely more heavily on schools to improve themselves.

### *Ensuring that external evaluations provide detailed feedback and actionable recommendations*

It is important that external school evaluations provide detailed feedback and recommendations to ensure that schools have a thorough understanding of what they need to do to improve (OECD, 2013b). In Romania, schools are required to address areas where ARACIP identifies that they have not fulfilled the necessary requirements in their external evaluations, which is a positive example of evaluation leading to action. However, ARACIP's evaluations do not provide detailed feedback or actionable recommendations for improvement across the domains assessed. This has traditionally been provided by the CSI and MNESR inspections.

Given the proposed changes to the school evaluation bodies described above, ARACIP, as the main external school evaluator, would need to provide all schools with feedback and recommendations that could inform their improvement efforts. This would be consistent with practices in countries like Sweden, where the national inspectorate provides all schools with very detailed and specific written feedback, including lengthy descriptions of areas where improvement is needed and a "to-do list" of actions (Nusche et al., 2011b). In England (United Kingdom), external school inspectors conclude their inspections with a feedback meeting with the principal, other members of the leadership team and the school board chair, in addition to providing a written report with recommendations (Ofsted, 2016).

### *Reinforcing follow-up for weaker schools and moving towards a differentiated approach to evaluation*

In addition to providing feedback, evaluators need to follow up with schools to ensure not only that evaluation results lead to action but also that schools have the capacity to improve. In Romania, follow-up activities after ARACIP evaluations are very rare. Internationally, some countries provide widespread follow-up, such as Poland and some regions of Spain, but this is a demanding practice; others focus their follow-up efforts on weaker schools, including the Flemish community of Belgium, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland (United Kingdom) (OECD, 2013b).

#### *Establishing follow-up procedures linked to external evaluation results*

Romania could consider establishing a system of clear follow-up procedures depending on the results of ARACIP's external school evaluations. Under this model, the CSIs would provide support to schools by meeting with and guiding educators in their efforts to improve their teaching, learning and school self-evaluation practices. Support should aim to be timely, flexible and adapted to schools' local needs (OECD, 2013b). Scotland (United Kingdom) provides an example of this type of follow-up system (Box 4.5).

These efforts would need to be underpinned by central support and financial investment from the government. An increasing number of European countries with external school evaluations have policies in place to provide remedial supports to schools, in the form of additional training or resources, if evaluations determine that these are needed in order to bring about required improvements (European Commission, 2015a). Romania should consider providing these kinds of supports to schools.

### *Combining lighter touch and more in-depth evaluations of schools most in need of improvement*

Once Romania's schools are better able to conduct self-evaluations (see Policy Issue 4.3), the country could consider adopting a differentiated approach to external school evaluation that combines "lighter touch" evaluations with more in-depth reviews of schools that need to improve the most. A differentiated approach would be particularly beneficial in Romania because it would work to reduce inequities in the education system by focusing attention on struggling schools, which have reportedly been neglected in the past.

Internationally, a differentiated approach can take different forms and often relies to a considerable extent on the results of schools' self-evaluations. For example, the Netherlands conducts external evaluations of all schools on a regular basis but conducts more frequent inspections if risk factors (e.g. poor student outcomes) are evident in schools' self-evaluation reports (Shewbridge et al, 2014). In New Zealand's differentiated school evaluation system, close collaboration between internal and external evaluators leads to decisions about the frequency of future evaluations (Box 4.5).

**Box 4.5. Following up with weaker schools and differentiating school evaluation**

In Scotland (United Kingdom), external school evaluations conducted by Education Scotland can have three different outcomes:

- **No continuing engagement:** external school evaluation results are satisfactory and indicate that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvement. No follow-up visits are necessary.
- **Additional support:** external school evaluation results determine that a school would benefit from support. This is provided by Education Scotland staff in partnership with the local authority.
- **Further inspection:** external school evaluation results indicate that the school needs support and time to make necessary improvements. Education Scotland staff work with the local authority to determine the most appropriate support to help the school build capacity to improve and returns to assess improvements within a set period of time.

New Zealand has a differentiated approach to external school evaluation in which evaluations are tailored to support the schools that need it most. During external evaluations, New Zealand's Education Review Office (ERO) and the school work closely to mutually determine strengths and areas where development is needed, focusing on the results of the school's self-evaluation. The ERO decides on the timing of a school's next external evaluation based on the results of its current evaluation. External evaluations may be conducted within one to two years, in three years, or in four to five years. Most schools are reviewed every three years. The ERO will evaluate a school more frequently if it is concerned about the education and safety of students, and less frequently if the school exhibits high performance in relation to the dimensions of a successful school.

*Sources*: Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en; ERO (2016), "Return times for school reviews", Education Review Office website, www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-schools-and-kura/return-times-for-school-reviews/http://www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-schools-and-kura/return-times-for-school-reviews/; European Commission (2015a), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe,* Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

### *Ensuring school comparisons are fair and meaningful*

#### *Ending the unfair ranking of schools*

The ministry's ranking of schools based on raw student results strongly influences the public perception of school performance in Romania. Using a Ministry website, users can find a list of national high schools ranked by the marks that students received in their Grade 8 national examination when the entered the school (Admitere, 2016). This type of ranking offers a poor measure of the quality of education in a school as it reflects factors affecting student performance that are beyond the school's control (OECD, 2013b). Schools suffer very real negative consequences from poor rankings in Romania, beyond parents opting against sending their children to certain schools. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that CSIs may investigate schools with poor results on the national school ranking, and in some cases a poor ranking may lead to sanctions, such as the removal of the school management. Given the above factors, this ranking should stop.

Instead, the Ministry should think about how it could provide the public with more descriptive information about the school, like the socio-economic status of the school community and other factors that impact student learning, and the school's ARACIP efficiency index, alongside examination results. This information could be presented online in clear, plain language that is relatively easy for parents to understand.

#### *Making better use of the ARACIP efficiency index*

ARACIP's efficiency index provides a fairer picture of school performance, and a more helpful benchmark for school improvement purposes. While the index is made public, and a school at top of the index recently received an award from the President, it is not currently used in any systematic way. In particular, those who could make greatest use of it – schools, CSIs and the ministry – seem to be largely unaware of its availability and potential value. This should be improved by a ministerial decision in 2016 to extend the index to all schools. Romania might also consider how to make the index more visible, for example by including some of its findings in the national State of Education report (see Chapter 5) and in public reporting on schools (see above).

Nationally and at the county level, the efficiency index could be used to recognise and share the effective practices of schools that are doing better than expected, given their circumstances. Schools could be encouraged to use it as evidence and areas for discussion, to inform their self-evaluation and to identify neighbours with similar profiles to build networks. The CSIs could use it for ongoing monitoring purposes. Given its potential to present an alternative view of the country's schools, possibly revealing weaknesses among schools that would normally be considered higher performers, the government will need to support its use.

## Policy Issue 4.3: Strengthening school self-evaluation

School self-evaluation benefits individual schools and education systems as a whole. Establishing a self-evaluation system that supports both school development and accountability, accompanied by appropriate external support and challenge, is one of the most effective ways for a country to improve the quality of its education system (SICI, 2003). It puts schools in a position to drive their own development, continuously reflecting on their own practices, and planning and implementing changes (OECD, 2013b).

In Romania, real efforts have been made to establish self-evaluation in all schools. However, the education system seems to be experiencing an "imbalance in self-evaluation", where schools' internal evaluations are being completed primarily for an external evaluating body and are not yet viewed as a useful school improvement process (Janssens and van Amelsvoort, 2008). This may reflect a limited understanding of the purposes and benefits of school self-evaluation. Given the competitive nature of education in Romania, factors such as the pressure on schools to perform well, the blame they face for poor results and a limited sense of community responsibility for education are all likely to discourage schools from identifying what they consider to be weaknesses or mistakes (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Schools may not feel that they are in a position to improve, whether due to a lack of capacity, support or funding. To address this, Romania will need to ensure that schools understand the benefits of self-evaluation have the capacity to conduct it and can effectively respond to the results with improvement measures.

### *Making self-evaluation meaningful for schools*

According to the 2005 Quality Assurance Law, school self-evaluation should support both school improvement and improve accountability in Romania. But there is evidence that it is not yet treated as a developmental process. In 2009, ARACIP found that, out of approximately 1 020 schools, 90% were giving themselves "good" to "excellent" ratings on all evaluation indicators and were leaving sections of the yearly report blank (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). This was the case with the yearly report the OECD review team examined, which did not describe any improvement activities the school had conducted. A 2010 study in two Romanian counties found few examples of schools reflecting on their practices and making changes to their activities as a result (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Likewise, ARACIP has found that schools' self-evaluation commissions tend to focus more on the administrative aspects of evaluation, producing and completing documents rather than focusing on quality improvements (ARACIP, 2014b).

To support a shift in mindset, and to ensure school self-evaluation practices actually support improvement efforts, Romania would benefit from reviewing its school self-evaluation system, including the role of the principal, the relationship between self-evaluation and the school management cycle, and self-evaluation reporting requirements.

#### *Giving principals a central role in school self-evaluation*

Principals in Romania should be much more involved in school self-evaluation, co-ordinating the process and encouraging school staff to invest in self-evaluation as a worthwhile improvement activity. Currently, principals in Romania help to set school's improvement priorities and approve the work of their school's Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, but they are not required to sit on the commission. In contrast, in most OECD countries, principals lead their schools' self-evaluation efforts (Faubert, 2009).

There are a number of reasons why school leaders are appropriate for this role. Principals are generally expected to take ownership of their school's performance. They lead practices that can improve outcomes, such as setting goals for the school, co-ordinating the curriculum, monitoring and evaluating teaching practice, and promoting teachers' professional development (Schleicher, 2012). Principals are also commonly responsible for reaching out to parents and other members of the community, whose

involvement in the school self-evaluation process promotes a shared sense of responsibility for children's education and well-being (Pont et al., 2008).

School improvement and pedagogical leadership should be viewed as key components of the principal role in Romania (see Policy Issue 4.4). As part of this, they should be required to serve as the heads of their schools' Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation. It will also be important for the ministry to work with ARACIP and the CSIs to review the circumstances of the country's approximately 14 000 satellite schools (as of 2011), which do not have on-site principals, to determine what particular support they may need in order to conduct effective self-evaluations (World Bank, 2010).

### *Integrating school self-evaluation into the management cycle*

Self-evaluation in Romania currently operates in addition to both external evaluation and internal school management processes. This weakens the feedback loop between evaluation and improvement. Creating a meaningful self-evaluation process that contributes effectively to school improvement, will require integrating it into the way schools operate.

Internally, schools in Romania seem to operate two separate improvement planning tracks. On the one hand, the principal and school board lead the development of, and report against, the annual management plan which sets out how the school is doing in relation to the CSI's general school inspection criteria. On the other hand, the school's Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation lead the self-evaluation process according to the ARACIP standards (Colegiul National Unirea, 2015).

An integrated approach would help to ensure that school evaluation is more focused on school improvement and leads to specific actions, while making self-evaluation an integral part of school self-management. Ensuring that the principal sits on the commission and takes an active role in the self-evaluation process will help, as will simplifying the self-evaluation model and orienting it more towards the outcomes associated with the agreed definition of a good school. Each school could use this definition to integrate their own set of goals into their annual management plans. They could then use the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation to critically review progress against these goals as part of their self-evaluation.

### *Reviewing self-evaluation reporting requirements*

Romania should consider introducing new reporting requirements that foster a sense of ownership rather than compliance, to encourage schools to engage more fully in their own review and improvement efforts. Currently, schools in Romania are required to complete a centrally developed annual improvement report template that asks them to provide a range of statistical information, rate themselves against the ARACIP school self-evaluation standards, and report on what activities they have conducted or plan to implement in two areas that are broad and general: quality improvement and internal evaluation. As a process for self-evaluation, this could be improved.

A new report template might include specific prompts that encourage the school to consider how the learning of students found to be struggling in the diagnostic assessments or other classroom-based assessments has improved over grades, or how the share of students with learning below national expectations has changed in the school over time. The Yearly Report template could also encourage schools to think creatively about what

aspects of the teaching and learning environment are especially relevant for their own local needs and community. Schools could be given the flexibility to adjust or add some of their own locally relevant criteria to the standard template. At the same time, the template could ask pointed questions about what schools are doing or planning to do to improve teaching and learning, specifically. This would fit well within a new, streamlined school evaluation framework (see Policy Issue 4.1), by giving schools the room to identify evaluation criteria that are relevant to them. It would also help to ensure that school evaluation is grounded in the actual work that schools do.

### *Providing schools with support and tools for self-evaluation*

In Romania, where school self-evaluation is still a relatively new practice, schools require meaningful support to build their internal review capacity and act upon the results of their evaluations. Providing training and guidance that meet the needs of school staff will be key to the effectiveness of schools' improvement efforts.

#### *Working with schools to develop new self-evaluation support material*

In 2005, when the Quality Assurance Law first introduced the requirement for school self-evaluation, schools in Romania were initially not provided with support or training to help them implement it (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Since then, ARACIP has taken the lead in developing these tools, relying primarily on funds from the European Union (EU). Between 2009 and 2015, ARACIP trained approximately 20 000 teachers, principals and inspectors on quality assurance and evaluation. ARACIP has also released video tutorials, conducted regional workshops and, in 2013, issued a self-evaluation manual and an effective practice guide. The agency reviews internal and external school evaluation reports annually to determine the areas in which schools may need more support.

Despite these efforts, multiple stakeholders reported to the OECD review team that school staff are not using the material ARACIP has developed. This may reflect, as discussed above, that schools do not yet feel engaged or see value in the self-evaluation process. It may also indicate that schools have not fully accepted the legitimacy of ARACIP's role or the benefits the agency can provide in supporting schools' internal review and improvement efforts. For these reasons, it will be important for ARACIP to engage schools in assessing their needs to ensure that future support material addresses the areas of greatest need and also to demonstrate that the agency is a partner in schools' self-evaluation efforts. This work could be undertaken in conjunction with the stakeholder engagement that will lead to the development of a new school evaluation framework (see Policy Issue 4.1).

In Romania, members of schools' Commissions for Quality Assurance and Evaluation do not currently need to participate in any training to prepare them for their self-evaluation role. To address this, online training and support material could be gradually developed for commission members, as well as principals and CSI inspectors. An example that could be of interest is the online National Improvement Hub of Scotland (United Kingdom), which provides improvement guides on topics such as working with community partners and effective practices to help schools improve (Education Scotland, 2017).

Members of the commissions also maintain a full teaching load and have little support for their additional evaluation work, in part because of a lack of administrative staff in schools. To support these teachers, the ministry could consider creating a distinct position within schools for teachers who have significant school self-evaluation responsibilities, as

Sweden currently does (Nusche et al., 2011b). This would align with the recommendation in Chapter 3 that Romania create teacher career paths with more diverse roles and responsibilities connected to higher remuneration.

### *Providing support for networking*

One particularly powerful support for self-evaluation and school improvement is school networking, which provides a forum for collegial sharing and learning (OECD, 2013b). Matching low-performing schools with high performers or past improvers can be particularly beneficial. Networks should be encouraged as spaces for collaboration rather than judgement, which can be a challenge in competitive education systems like Romania's (Looney, 2011). Scotland's "validated self-evaluation process" provides an international example of school networking specifically devoted to internal evaluation (OECD, 2015c). This process is led by local authorities with support from the centre, and provides clusters of schools with opportunities to share self-evaluation practices with each other.

There is some evidence that networking is happening in Romania. CSIs arrange "inter-assistance" networks for schools in their county, and schools take it upon themselves to establish connections with their peers. The government should provide funding to support this important practice to ensure it happens consistently in every county. Supporting both school and CSI networking could be among the new tasks undertaken by the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate.

### *Building data literacy*

According to ARACIP, in 2013/14 one of the reasons behind schools not meeting national standards was that institutional development decisions were not grounded in data (ARACIP, 2014a). In order to take ownership of their self-evaluation and improvement efforts, Romania's schools will need to become more adept at using data to set and measure progress towards improvement goals. To improve teaching and learning, it will be particularly important for schools to be able to set and work towards goals that relate to student outcomes, including outcomes for students' attitudes, competencies and knowledge in relation to the learning standards set out in Romania's new school curriculum (OECD, 2015b). Setting goals for institutional change, such as changes to teachers' behaviour or to the use of learning materials, will also be important (OECD, 2015b). In Romania, this could mean, for example, schools setting goals related to student motivation, and using their questionnaires of students to gather data to establish a target and monitor whether the improvement activities they implement are having an impact in reaching that target.

Schools in Romania will need external support to set goals and measure progress against them. This should involve the provision of data by central bodies, like ARACIP and the ministry (see Chapter 5). These data can serve as benchmarks to support both schools and counties with their improvement efforts.

## ***Progressively increasing school autonomy***

Ultimately self-evaluation is a tool for schools to lead change. To do this, schools need leadership capacity, but also the autonomy to take decisions on the factors that influence student learning. Romania now has in place most of the accountability measures that are characteristic of countries with greater school autonomy, including the existence of an independent external school evaluation body and the requirement that schools

publish their own self-evaluation results (Santiago et al., 2012). However, the country's schools lack decision-making authority in areas essential to improving teaching and learning, and are limited by a lack of funding. To bring about real change, Romania will need to encourage schools to assume greater leadership for teaching and learning practices, and ensure that schools have the resources to enact improvements. The country's political history and its legacy of centralised decision making means that increasing schools' agency will be as important as creating the space to do so, calling for policies that both enable and incentivise schools to lead change.

### *Increasing schools' decision-making authority over the curriculum and assessment*

Evidence suggests that schools with more autonomy over curriculum and assessment tend to perform better overall (OECD, 2013c). The OECD PISA 2015 assessment found that a lower percentage of students in Romania than the OECD average were in schools whose principal reported that the school (i.e. the principal and/or teachers) had considerable responsibility to make decisions in these areas (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. School autonomy over curriculum and assessment**

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that the school had decision-making authority for the following curriculum and assessment tasks

| Task | Romania (%) | OECDaverage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Establishingstudentassessmentpolicies | 40 | 61 |
| Choosingwhichtextbooksareused | 23 | 32 |
| Determiningcoursecontent | 13 | 27 |
| Decidingwhichcoursesareoffered | 34 | 64 |

*Source*: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en.

These factors are closely related in Romania. Since changes to the curriculum in 1998, schools have had the autonomy to determine part of the overall curriculum, but this has barely been used. In part this is because the pressure of high-stakes national examinations has crowded out space for teachers to develop alternative lesson plans and classroom activities. Scaling back examinations, encouraging teachers to collaborate more within the school and providing teachers with more preparation in formative student assessment (see Chapters 2 and 3) will be important to enable schools to take on greater authority for decisions related to teaching and learning.

### *Providing schools with the resources to support their improvement efforts*

Romania's schools also have less authority to make decisions about resource allocations, such as teacher hiring or budget allocation within the school, than the average among countries participating in PISA 2015 (OECD, 2016). They are further inhibited from assuming leadership to improve teaching and learning by chronic under-resourcing. Schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, in particular, lack the funds to cover more than teachers' salaries and administrative costs (European Commission, 2015b). It was indicated to the OECD review team during interviews that funding is also unpredictable and can be affected by a school's relationship to the local authority. Providing adequate, predictable funding to schools will be important to enable schools to

take on greater autonomy so they can use school self-evaluation as a lever for improvement.

One approach that other countries have employed, and Romania might consider, is the use of targeted discretionary funds to encourage schools to develop their own strategies to raise quality. For example, in 2011 England (United Kingdom) introduced the pupil premium which provides schools with an additional EUR 1 538 for each socio-economically disadvantaged student at the school[1]. Schools can use the funds in any way that they wish, but must provide detailed explanations of their spending to parents and communities, encouraging accountability. Schools then compete in a national competition for public recognition of the measures that they have put in place with the pupil premium. As Romania seeks to improve the effectiveness of its resource allocation, it might consider how it provides funding for specified purpose i.e. providing enveloped funding to encourage schools, in particular disadvantaged schools, to take the lead in improvement.

## Policy Issue 4.4: Developing the principal and school inspector roles

The fairer and de-politicised hiring procedures that Romania has begun to implement for principals, general inspectors and deputies are an important step towards increased stability and accountability in these roles, which are essential for sustained improvement in schools and across regions. However, given that these roles are so essential to the success of Romania's education system, the country cannot stop there. After teaching, school leadership is the most important factor affecting student learning that is open to policy influence. District leaders represent a critical mediating layer between schools and the government, providing support to both. Romania will need to redefine these roles away from administration and towards improving teaching, learning and student outcomes.

### *Supporting and developing principals' pedagogical leadership roles*

Romania needs to re-evaluate the school leadership role to make school principals more effective drivers of improvement and broader system-wide reform. This will require focusing the role more on responsibilities related to pedagogical leadership, including setting goals for student outcomes and supporting, advising and motivating teachers as they work towards them, conducting classroom observations, providing feedback and ensuring teachers are engaging in the professional development they need (Schleicher, 2012).

Currently, school leaders in Romania focus on administration rather than pedagogical leadership. The 2011 Education Law describes the principal's role as one of executive management. It lists only one task related to the quality of teaching and learning: being in charge of the periodical assessment, training and motivation of school staff.

#### *Ensuring that the most qualified and able candidates are selected as principals*

Re-evaluating the principal's role will mean looking at their professional duties, and the procedures used to recruit, prepare, support and appraise them. It will also mean addressing systemic factors that hinder effective school leadership in Romania, including principals' reportedly high administrative workload and low salaries.

- **Developing standards for principals**. The development of standards or competency profiles setting out what a principal should know and be able to do

would be an important component of this work. A number of countries have developed such standards to inform job descriptions, selection procedures, pre-service training, continuing professional development, support and appraisal for the role (OECD, 2013a). The standards could highlight the school improvement responsibilities of the position and encourage capacity building in those areas (OECD, 2013a).

Romania's Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) could be involved in developing these standards. While the IES has been engaged in school leadership research and training in the past, its educational management area is currently heavily understaffed. Romania would benefit from investing in this part of the IES, as well as dedicating staff within the ministry to work on policies to develop and support the school leadership role. As with the development of professional standards for teachers (see Chapter 3), principals will need to be involved in this work so that they feel ownership of the standards and the procedures they inform.

- **Ensuring that the selection of principals is an open, fair and authentic measure of their school leadership competencies.** Until autumn 2016 formal competitions for the principal role had not been held since 2007. Instead positions were filled for renewable six-month terms by CSI appointment. This appointment practice lacked transparency and created instability in the role. The 2011 Education Law introduced merit-based competitions for principals based on an examination of their managerial and psychological competencies, but this was reportedly met with political resistance in the majority of Romania's counties. In autumn 2016 an open contest for principal and deputy candidates was organised in all counties, with successful candidates receiving four-year contracts. This is a very important step forward and every effort should be made to ensure that these competitions continue to be conducted as the sole means of selection for new principals and their deputies.

  It is also important that principals are selected according to an authentic assessment of the competencies that are necessary for effective school leadership. Currently, the open contest for the school leadership role consists of a multiple-choice exam of the candidate's cognitive and school management skills, an analysis of their curriculum vitae (CV), and an interview that includes an assessment of the candidate's management vision and one-year operational plan. Going forward, the new standards for school leadership should inform the criteria for selecting principals, including the contents of the written examination, to ensure that candidates are assessed for the competencies needed to be effective in administrative and pedagogical leadership.

  In the long-term, Romania should consider moving away from the use of a written examination as part of the job competition towards more authentic measures of school leadership competencies. Internationally, it is common for countries to base their evaluation of school leadership candidates on their interview performance and work proposals for the school (Pont et al., 2008). Some countries, like England (United Kingdom), have advised recruitment panels to use additional performance-based methods of assessing candidates' competencies and suitability for the role, like observations of their interactions with students, presentations and role-playing exercises (National College for School Leadership, 2012).

- **Involving schools in appointing principals**. The 2011 Education Law gave school boards the authority to hire principals, but this responsibility has since been given back to the CSIs. As school boards are in the best position to understand their schools' needs and challenges, Romania should consider involving them in hiring decisions again and provide guidelines on recruitment procedures to ensure they have the capacity to fulfil this responsibility (Pont et al., 2008). Teaching staff could also be solicited for their input in these decisions. Across Europe, school staff commonly provide input into the selection of the principal (European Commission, 2011).
- **Reviewing principals' salaries**. It is important to make school leadership an attractive career option for potential candidates. One factor that can influence the attractiveness of the leadership role is remuneration (Pont et al., 2008). In most European countries, the minimum starting salary for principals exceeds GDP per capita (European Commission, 2015c), but this is not the case in Romania. As of 2014/15, the minimum starting salary for principals is EUR 3 374 at primary level and EUR 3 903 at secondary level, both lower than Romania's per capita GDP of around EUR 8 000 (European Commission, 2015c). It was also the lowest minimum starting salary for principals of all European countries. Romania would benefit from reviewing the remuneration of its school and system leaders, particularly if it is experiencing difficulty finding qualified candidates.
- **Developing succession planning policies.** Countries should go beyond relying solely on candidates to select themselves forward for consideration for the principal role, and instead develop succession-planning policies to proactively identify and foster future leaders (Schleicher, 2012). One approach to such succession planning is to distribute leadership responsibilities within a school so that teachers gain experience. Romania already does this by allowing teachers to hold responsibilities on a number of different school commissions (MNESR, 2016b). However, this practice is seemingly not part of an intentional succession-planning policy.

### *Providing principals with professional learning opportunities targeted to their roles*

Principals in Romania need to be better prepared to address the demands of their role. Prospective principals need to be permanent teachers with five years of seniority, positive annual appraisal results and didactic grade qualifications signifying teaching excellence (see Chapter 3). On top of this, they must complete pre-service courses on educational management. However, it appears that these courses are intended to prepare teachers for any management or guidance and control position, whether as a school leader or an inspector. As such, they do not seem to target the learning needs of future principals. It is important that Romania develop pre-service education for school leaders which concentrates specifically on the requirements of the role, covering both administrative responsibilities and responsibilities related to improving teaching and learning.

Once appointed, principals, like all teachers, are required to accumulate 90 credits of continuing professional development every 5 years. The IES, ministry and the Teachers' Training Houses affiliated to each CSI deliver some in-service training targeted specifically at principals. Each CSI also employs institutional management inspectors to provide advice to principals and oversee their work. However, it was repeatedly indicated to the OECD review team during interviews that principals do not feel adequately

supported to address administrative problems, legal issues and the needs of the struggling satellite schools that fall under their responsibility. They reportedly lack training in areas important to pedagogy, like implementing the new school curriculum and supporting teachers in the changes that it requires in terms of teaching and learning.

It is important that the ministry, IES and ARACIP, in consultation with principals and representatives of the CSIs, including the Teachers' Training Houses, consider developing professional learning opportunities that will allow school leaders to build capacity in the competencies they will need to be effective instructional and administrative leaders. Like New Zealand (Box 4.6), Romania could use school leadership standards as the basis for the development of these opportunities. It should also ensure that principals have access to mentoring, networking and other collaborative activities proven to be particularly beneficial in developing their competencies (Pont et al., 2008). The school leaders who spoke to the review team particularly expressed a need for this type of on-the-job learning. As discussed earlier, ARACIP will be instrumental in developing professional learning opportunities that build principals' capacity in school self-evaluation and school improvement. The role of the CSI institutional management inspector will also need to be strengthened to provide more support to principals in their efforts to evaluate and improve their schools (see below).

**Box 4.6. New Zealand's Professional Leadership Plan**

New Zealand's Professional Leadership Plan was introduced in 2009-10 to provide a range of professional learning opportunities to aspiring, new and experienced principals. It was developed by the New Zealand principals' associations, the Ministry of Education and leadership researchers based on the country's standards for principals, *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*. The plan was intended to develop leadership practices identified by the research literature as important for improving student outcomes, as well as to attract school leaders to harder-to-staff schools and retain effective principals. The plan included the following elements:

- for new principals, an induction programme, improved regional support and resources on topics like managing schools and relationships and leading effective teaching and learning
- for experienced principals, resources on teacher appraisal, leading effective curriculum delivery and leading change to improve student outcomes.

*Sources*: New Zealand Ministry of Education (2008), *Professional Leadership Plan 2009-2010*, New Zealand Ministry of Education; New Zealand Education Gazette (2009), *Plan Ahead for Educational Leadership*, New Zealand Ministry of Education, www.edgazette.govt.nz/articles/Article.aspx?ArticleId=7867; Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand (2011)*, OECD Publishing, Paris http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en,

### *Establishing clear criteria for appraising principals and ending arbitrary dismissal*

The CSIs are responsible for appraising principals in Romania. The CSI's institutional management inspectors appraise principals on the basis of their school's annual management plan. It appears that each CSI is responsible for establishing the criteria against which principals are assessed. If so, this presents a concern, as a lack of common criteria for appraisal can hinder consistency and transparency. Principal appraisals should instead be guided by common, system-wide standards of good school leadership (Pont et al., 2008). Appraisal should also be connected to appropriate support

and continuing professional development (Pont et al., 2008). This can be accomplished by requiring principals to maintain an annual learning plan setting out strategies for growth and development.

In addition, any appraisal process should include procedures to address underperformance, including a clearly articulated process of follow-up appraisals, remedial support and, ultimately, dismissal if appraisal results are unsatisfactory. The 2011 Education Law gave school boards the authority to dismiss principals, but this responsibility appears to have been recentralised to the CSIs. It was reported to the OECD review team during interviews that the CSIs may remove school managements if students underperform on national exams for a certain number of years. It is essential for any sanctions, including dismissal, to be based on a clearly articulated, step-by-step process. Decisions to dismiss principals will need to be fair and defensible, acknowledging the contexts in which their schools operate rather than focusing solely on raw student results.

*Addressing the challenges of satellite schools*

Several systemic factors in Romania appear to be making principals' jobs particularly challenging. This includes a school restructuring process that has left some principals responsible for multiple schools and a system-wide reduction in the number of administrative staff. As of 2011, there were approximately 7 000 principals in Romania responsible for 21 000 schools, including legally designated schools and satellite schools, which do not have an on-site principal (World Bank, 2010). In one county the Review Team visited, over one-third of the schools were considered satellite schools. As mentioned above, this has left principals with responsibilities for which they have not been prepared. Deputy principals are supposed to support principals with their administrative workload, but it was reported to the Review Team in interviews that they are not always allocated to the schools that need them.

*Resolving principals' unclear accountability*

There are also challenges associated with a lack of clarity around school governance in Romania. According to the 2011 Education Law, the school board, in addition to the principal, is responsible for the quality of education in the school. This legislation was intended to provide the local community, through their representatives on the school board, with a greater role in the provision of education and to make the principal more accountable to the community. However, it was reported to the OECD review team in interviews that, in practice, school principals have remained primarily accountable to and report to the CSI. In addition, school board members who represent the community have reportedly struggled because they lack familiarity with education matters. It will be essential for the ministry to address these challenges, including clarifying the relationship between the school board and the principal and ensuring that school board members have the capacity to contribute to school governance, in order to ensure all schools have clear leadership. This will be important for both improvement and accountability.

### *Changing the role of inspector from control to support*

Romania's schools need more support, particularly with their self-evaluation and improvement efforts, and the CSI inspectors are well positioned to provide it. To do so effectively, Romania will need to address factors that are currently impeding inspectors' ability to play a more supportive role. These encompass the organisational structure of the CSIs, including the roles and responsibilities of inspectors, workload and staffing

challenges, and a lack of capacity-building opportunities. Addressing these factors could fall within the scope of work to revise the mandates of the different external school evaluation bodies, as recommended in Policy Issue 4.1.

These efforts will take time and will require the altering of long-held perceptions of the CSIs as controllers rather than supporters of schools. Box 4.7 provides examples of countries that have made efforts to strengthen their subnational education bodies in order to better support school self-evaluation and improvement. Educators, ARACIP, key stakeholders and experts in school improvement will be valuable sources of input at the outset of this work and as changes are implemented. Although beyond the scope of this report, reinforcing the support function of CSIs will also involve reviewing their relationship to local governments. The almost total absence of local government involvement in efforts to improve the quality of schooling in Romania has important implications for public accountability and responsibility for education.

**Box 4.7. Supporting school self-evaluation and improvement at the subnational level**

In England, Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom), subnational bodies called local education authorities monitor and support school improvement within the context of a school evaluation system that includes school self-evaluation and external school evaluation conducted by a central government body or inspectorate. District school boards in some parts of Canada and the United States also have similar subnational bodies, although their school evaluation systems vary.

In England (United Kingdom), the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), a government department, conducts comprehensive inspections of all schools every six years. Local education authorities (LEAs) do not have a specific school evaluation mandate, but they are expected to monitor schools. LEAs visit the schools in their area once a year to help set targets for improvement and to identify schools that are experiencing difficulties.

In Scotland (United Kingdom), local authorities are required by law to support schools in using their self-evaluation results to produce an annual report and to plan improvements. Although the main external school evaluations are conducted by Education Scotland, the central government agency, local authorities have autonomy to conduct their own school evaluations to help improve schools. All bodies use the same school evaluation framework.

In Wales (United Kingdom), the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn) is the main body responsible for external school evaluations, and 22 local authorities, support schools to improve. The local authorities are accountable by law for school performance and have the authority to intervene and organise schools. They monitor schools on an ongoing basis. In 2013, Wales established four regional education consortia as a layer above the local authority level as part of a shift towards supporting schools to build their own capacity and sustain their own improvement. The consortia provide a range of supports to both local authorities and schools.

*Sources*: Faubert V., (2009), "School evaluation: Current practices in OECD countries and a literature review", *OECD Education Working Papers,* No. 42, PECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/218816547156; Mourshed, M. et al. (2010), *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better,* McKinsey & Company, London; Estyn (2015), *Improving Schools through Regional Education Consortia,* Office of Her majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn), Cardiff, www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf; European Commission (2015a), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

### *The organisational structure and responsibilities of the CSIs*

Changing the function of CSIs towards a more explicitly supportive role will require structural changes in their organisation and responsibilities. Other countries have developed specific positions to support school improvement in their sub-national educational bodies (see Box 4.8). Romania could do this by creating a dedicated school improvement unit within each CSI that provides support to local schools, and is separate from any continuing monitoring or compliance function within the CSIs. This change will require a significant shift in the functions and competencies of the CSI inspectors who currently conduct school inspections. In the short term, the role of existing school inspectors might be re-oriented towards school improvement to staff the new school improvement unit. It will be important that these inspectors receive training to help them build capacity for their new role (see below). Progressively, existing staff might be complemented by new staff recruited for the school improvement unit based on their competencies and experience in supporting school improvement.

**Box 4.8. Key school improvement positions within subnational education bodies**

In Wales (United Kingdom), regional education consortia employ several different types of staff, including specialists in different teaching and learning areas, and a large number of challenge advisers. The challenge adviser positions were created specifically to support principals to build school capacity to meet standards. There are four main aspects to their role, set out in the *National Standards for Challenge Advisers*:

1. supporting school evaluation and improvement (e.g. supporting school leaders to conduct classroom observations and improve the quality of teaching; supporting effective target setting as part of strategic planning)
2. arranging effective support and intervention (e.g. identify resources to address school needs; facilitating school-to-school networking)
3. developing school leadership (e.g. mentoring, coaching and using evidence to review performance and impact)
4. building school-to-school capacity (e.g. determining ways in which good schools can support others).

In the early 2000s, the Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada, introduced a system-wide reform initiative to improve students' competencies in literacy and numeracy. The most successful district school boards responded to this initiative by reorganising their offices to ensure that their structure, staffing and roles and responsibilities aligned with the focus on literacy and numeracy. Supervisory officers with literacy and numeracy expertise were appointed to drive forward the initiative across the district. As the government's education agenda evolved over time, district school boards continued to include among their staff superintendents responsible for each of the government's key reform programmes. District staff work collaboratively with schools, as well as horizontally, building networks across the education system.

*Sources*: Campbell, C. and M. Fullan (2006), Unlocking Potential for Learning: Effective District-Wide Strategies to Raise Student Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ProjectReport_full.pdf.
Welsh Government (2014), National Standards for Challenge Advisers, Welsh Government, Cardiff, http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/141009-challenge-advisers-en.pdf.
European Commission (2015a), Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Romania will need to review inspectors' workloads to determine where changes are necessary to enable CSIs to focus more on support. Inspectors are particularly burdened by the large number of specialty inspections they are required to conduct to support teachers' completion of their probation period and career progression. They reportedly spend 41.9% of their time monitoring, controlling and reporting to the ministry and doing other work not related to supporting teachers and principals (World Bank, 2010). It has already been suggested that the CSIs' responsibility for conducting specialty inspections should be shifted to a cadre of experienced teachers. This would enable inspectors to move away from their role as appraisers, which is incompatible with school support, and enable them to devote more time to supporting schools (see Chapter 3).

There is also scope to improve the resourcing of the CSIs. In 2010, the World Bank found that the number of inspectors within each county did not relate to size of the county nor the county's particular needs. Since then, the disproportionate allocation of CSI staff has reportedly developed into a general understaffing problem affecting inspectorates across the country. However, it is also evident that the staff resources that are available could be used more effectively. Given the demands of the inspector role, consideration might also be given to making the positions full-time and eliminating the requirement that staff maintain teaching responsibilities. Most CSI staff do not work full-time for the inspectorate, even if they have management positions (World Bank, 2011). Romania will need to address these issues if the CSIs are to provide effective support to schools.

### *Selecting inspectors*

As with the principal role, Romania needs to continue to support the new open and competitive process for recruiting general school inspectors to eliminate political interference. Inspectors are supposed to be appointed for four-year terms, but changes in government in the past at the national level have resulted in high turnover in the role. Turnover is lower but still high among inspectors below the management level (World Bank, 2010). The 2011 Education Law set out new merit-based hiring procedures, including the requirement that prospective inspectors pass an exam but, like the similar requirement for principals, this was not implemented across the country until autumn 2016. It is essential that Romania ensure that the new open, transparent and merit-based competitions for these positions continue and become the established practice for recruiting all inspector positions.

In addition to more transparent and open recruitment procedures, it will also be important to establish clear selection criteria that relate to the competencies and responsibilities needed for the inspector role. This should include selection criteria for candidates in the CSIs' new school improvement unit, who should be required to demonstrate that they have experience with school self-evaluation and school improvement. In Wales (United Kingdom), for example, individuals competing for a "challenge adviser" position to support school self-evaluation are expected to have: experience leading in a successful school; expertise in analysing and using school improvement data; an understanding of how to implement school improvement; and strong interpersonal skills (Welsh government, 2014).

### *Building inspectors' capacity*

Capacity building will be essential to ensure that inspectors are able to make the fundamental shift in their functions to be able to better support school improvement. It will also be important to ensure that capacity levels are consistent across the country so

that all schools receive sufficient support to meet their needs. ARACIP (2014b) found differences in schools' performance across counties that could not be explained by geographic, demographic, economic, social or cultural differences, and concluded that the quality of education in schools was largely dependent on the managerial and institutional capacity at the county level. The ministry provides once yearly information and training activities to inspectors; otherwise, in-service training opportunities specific to the inspector role are reportedly very limited.

To help CSI inspectors develop the skills and knowledge to support teachers and principals, Romania might focus initially on developing pre-service training that prepares them for their new role. The Teachers' Training Houses would be instrumental in these efforts. CSI inspectors should also benefit from the training on school self-evaluation and improvement developed by ARACIP discussed earlier. As the inspector role evolves, the mentoring of new inspectors by more experienced inspectors will allow the inspectorates to build capacity in ways that are embedded in their work.

Finally, to ensure coherence with national goals, each CSI should set county-relevant goals, linked to national education priorities (see Chapter 5). To encourage accountability, the appraisal of both the general school inspectors and individual inspectors could be linked to progress in attaining those goals. The development of an annual learning plan as part of the CSI appraisal process would encourage career-long capacity development.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Revising school evaluation in Romania to support greater focus on teaching and learning practices and outcomes for all students will be an essential component of broader education reform to raise student achievement and increase equity. Aligning and integrating the efforts of the different bodies responsible for school evaluation and improvement will create greater efficiency and ensure that all levels of the education system are working towards common goals. Supporting schools to evaluate and develop themselves will be an effective way to promote sustained improvement across the education system. Strengthening the roles of Romania's school and system leaders will put them in a position to drive the reform.

### *Recommendations*

#### *4.1: Establish a common framework for school evaluation*

**4.1.1. Develop a common definition of a "good school" to ensure that all evaluators and schools are guided by the same expectations and focus on what matters most for school improvement**. Use this definition to develop a single framework for school evaluation that addresses what is missing in the existing frameworks. The new framework should be based on a few high-quality standards and ensure that evaluation draws on multiple sources of evidence and that external evaluation reinforces self-evaluation.

**4.1.2. Revise the mandates of the external evaluation bodies to reduce duplication and ensure that each organisation performs the role it is best qualified to fill** (see Figure 0.4 in the Assessment and Recommendations). ARACIP should be established as the main external school evaluator, given its independence and expertise in external and internal school evaluation. The CSIs' close relationship with schools means that they are well placed to become the main providers of county-level support for school

improvement. Finally, the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate should shift its mandate from direct inspection to overseeing the CSIs' work, monitoring national priorities and policies, and supporting delivery.

### *4.2: Use evaluation results to better support school improvement*

**4.2.1. Ensure that schools receive sufficient feedback and follow-up support to improve.** ARACIP inspections should result in detailed feedback and actionable recommendations for schools. Romania should establish follow-up procedures so that CSIs provide schools with timely and specific support to improve on the basis of the results of ARACIP's external evaluations.

**4.2.2. Consider a differentiated approach to external school evaluation in the future.** As schools' capacity for self-evaluation develops, schools with more mature self-evaluation processes and culture may receive "lighter touch" external evaluations. Struggling schools can be supported by more in-depth external evaluations, focusing attention and support where it is most needed.

**4.2.3. Ensure that public reporting is based on a fair measure of school performance.** Make greater use of ARACIP's efficiency index for public reporting. The efficiency index takes into account the contextual factors that may influence a school's performance and compares the performance of different schools, in terms of student outcomes, with other schools operating in similar conditions with similar resources. As the index tries to account for school context, it provides a fairer measure of school performance than the ministry's school ranking based on raw student examination results.

### *4.3: Strengthen school self-evaluation*

**4.3.1. Raise the profile of self-evaluation within schools and integrate it into improvement activities.** Principals are central to engaging the whole school in self-evaluation and ensuring that it links to school improvement. As such, they should have a central role in the self-evaluation process by serving as the head of their school's Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation. At the same time, school self-evaluation should be integrated into schools' management cycle so that schools use the new definition of a good school to set a single set of goals for their annual management plan, and use the self-evaluation process to review progress against these goals.

**4.3.2. Develop schools' capacity for self-evaluation.** Provide training for school staff and CSIs on self-evaluation, and support networking among schools to encourage mutual capacity development.

**4.3.3. Ensure that schools have the resources and autonomy to implement improvements.** Provide schools with adequate, predictable funding so that they can plan and implement improvements. Providing targeted discretionary funds could also help to encourage schools to develop their own strategies for improvement. Consider progressively increasing schools' authority over assessment and teacher recruitment, while using evaluation to build schools' capacity to be able to use their existing autonomy over the curriculum, so that they are able to innovate and adapt teaching and learning practices to their specific needs and goals.

**4.3.4. Ensure that school self-evaluation is grounded in schools' actual work and needs.** Give schools the flexibility to adjust or add some of their own locally relevant criteria to the standard template for self-evaluation so that they can adapt the self-evaluation process to their own needs.

### *4.4: Develop the principal and school inspector roles*

**4.4.1. Ensure that the procedures for hiring principals and CSI inspectors are fair and transparent.** This is essential for the stability, accountability and quality of these roles. The establishment of annual contests that are regulated according to transparent criteria and standardised examinations is a valuable step towards ensuring recruitment is fair and managed with integrity. As trust and capacity for this selection process grows, Romania should progressively develop performance-based recruitment procedures that are more effective in assessing candidates' aptitude for the role.

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**4.4.2. Encourage and enable principals to be more effective drivers of school improvement.** Develop standards that set out what a principal should know and be able to do, and use these standards to develop a consistent procedure for appraising principals. End the arbitrary dismissal of principals by creating a step-by-step procedure to address underperformance. Ensure that principals have opportunities to build capacity as effective pedagogical and administrative leaders through professional learning. Principals' salaries, which are low by national and international standards, should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to involving schools in hiring decisions and creating succession planning procedures to ensure that the role is filled by the best candidates.

**4.4.3. Resolve the systemic challenges of satellite schools and principals' unclear accountability.** Principals responsible for satellite schools are not adequately prepared or supported to lead improvements in this context. This should be addressed by, for example, allocating deputy principals to support school leaders' administrative workload as appropriate, reducing the number of schools for which a principal may be responsible, or making broader changes to the school network so that all schools have an equal chance to improve. Resolving the lack of clarity around school governance by clarifying who the principal is accountable to, and ensuring that school boards have sufficient capacity to effectively exercise their responsibilities will also support school improvement.

**4.4.4. Shift the CSI inspector role from control to support.** This would be facilitated by a change in the CSIs' structure, including the creation of a dedicated school improvement unit within each CSI. CSI inspectors would also need to build capacity to focus more on school improvement, which could be provided through dedicated training, mentoring and networking.

## Note

1. Calculated based on British Pound to Euro exchange rate as of 12 December, 2011. The original value in British pound was GBP 1 300.

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# *Chapter 5*

# System evaluation in Romania: Using information for system improvement

*This chapter looks at how Romania uses information about the education system to monitor its performance and inform policy making. While it does have many of the components of system evaluation in place, it lacks a coherent national strategy to draw on this information effectively. This chapter suggests that the "Educated Romania" initiative could help to address this by creating a national education strategy underpinned by indicators to monitor progress. The absence of standardised data on student outcomes and the contextual information that might shape learning weakens system evaluation in Romania; the Grade 4 national assessment could be revised to address these gaps. Finally, educational improvement hinges on feedback; making information more accessible at the local and school levels will help them to make better use of data to lead improvement.*

## Introduction

Romania has many of the constituent parts of system-monitoring and evaluation in place. It collects information on student learning outcomes through national and international assessments, it is improving the breadth and reliability of its statistical tools to capture educational data, it collects information about the learning environment in schools, and government bodies and non-governmental agencies produce insightful policy research and analysis. What Romania lacks, however, is a coherent and continued approach to evaluation that draws on this information in a consistent way to inform national education policies and practices in schools. This reduces its capacity to provide fair and accurate accountability information to the public on how the education system is working, and to inform policy making for educational improvements, which are the two main goals of system evaluation (OECD, 2013).

Improving system evaluation could catalyse progress in education in Romania. Setting a long-term strategic vision for the sector built on a broad-based national consensus, with clear, measurable goals, would be an important first step, and would help to orient policy reforms and prioritise investments. The current discussion around a new education law and the "Educated Romania" initiative to develop an education strategy offer the opportunity to develop this vision into action. Underpinning national education goals with a rigorous monitoring framework and regular reporting would strengthen public accountability and encourage more systematic use of data to inform policy making.

A strong monitoring framework would also propel Romania into addressing key data gaps. Better information about the contextual factors that influence student learning and the use of financial resources will be critical to addressing systemic challenges of high dropout rates and relatively low student achievement. Better information – and greater capacity to use it – would also mean that central government is better equipped to steer reform, while counties and schools would be better able to understand their current strengths, and put in place appropriate strategies for improvement.

## Context and main features of system evaluation in Romania

### *The national vision for education*

The 2011 Education Law sets out the overall objective of education in Romania. This is to develop individuals' competencies in the form of multifunctional and transferable knowledge; skills, abilities and aptitudes for personal accomplishment; social and economic integration; and respect for human rights. According to the law, the education system is governed by a set of principles that include fairness, quality, relevance, efficiency and public responsibility.

Implementation of the Education Law has been mixed. While some parts of the law were supported by implementation plans, changes in policy direction and political leadership led to discontinuity and the plans were only partially realised. Implementation of other parts of the law has been significantly delayed; for example, individualised learning plans for students to accompany the new national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 are still not in place nationwide. In other cases still, subsequent amendments to the law have reversed its original intent. The Education Law aimed to support decentralisation, for example devolving responsibility for teacher hiring to schools, but this was later amended and remains the responsibility of the County School Inspectorates (CSIs).

Romania has recently developed sector-based education strategies, which are linked to the achievement of its European Union (EU) 2020 targets and were the condition for receiving EU structural funds (Box 5.1). In general, the sector strategies are well aligned with the objectives and principles of the 2011 law and provide a clear plan to address the prominent challenges of Romania's education system. For example, the strategy on reducing early school leaving includes the development of an early warning system to detect children at risk, and professional development for teachers working with vulnerable groups. It also aims to strengthen the government's capacity to implement, monitor and evaluate early school leaving. While the strategies have given impetus to reform, their external financing and accountability may limit national ownership and sustainability.

**Box 5.1. Romania and the Europe 2020 strategy**

Europe 2020 is the European Union's jobs and growth strategy for 2010-20. It aims to create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across the EU, with national targets in five key sectors including education.

Romania has developed its own national targets for Europe 2020. Those that are specifically related to education include the reduction of early leavers from education and training to less than 11.3% by 2020 and at least 26.7% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary level education by 2020.

These targets have informed the development of five national strategies:

- National Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving 2015-2020
- National Strategy for Tertiary Education in Romania, 2015-2020
- National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, 2016-2020
- National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020
- National Strategy for Infrastructure Investments in Education Institutions (under development).

The national strategies are supported by an extensive national and European-level monitoring system. As part of a standard EU-wide process, Romania produces an annual National Reform Programme which sets out the actions that it will put in place to support its EU 2020 targets. The European Commission monitors Romania's progress towards its EU 2020 targets, and based on this progress and the national report, issues country specific recommendations.

*Source*: European Commission (2016), "Europe 2020 in Romania", European Commission website, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe- 2020-in-your-country/romania/index_en.htm.

### *Responsibilities for system evaluation*

The Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR) has overall responsibility for system evaluation in Romania (Figure 5.1). It exercises this role primarily through its Public Policy Department, which is charged with monitoring the education system, supporting the development and analysis of policies, and supporting strategic management in the MNESR. The department publishes the State of Education report, an annual report on the education system in Romania. It is also responsible for co-ordinating and reporting on the five national strategies. At the time of the OECD review team's visit in July 2016, the Public Policy Department had nine staff, a mixture of civil servants and contractual staff with expertise in European affairs and public management.

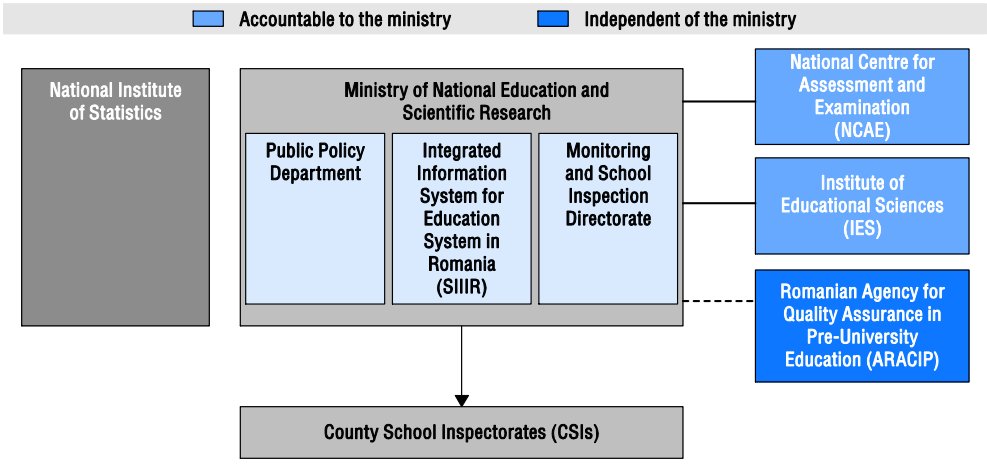
The MNESR also contains the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate, which conducts direct school evaluations, and the unit for Information Technology in Education, which is responsible for the Integrated Information System for Education System in Romania (SIIIR), collecting school-level education data.

Specialised agencies that operate at arms length from the ministry also provide data and evaluation of the education system. These include the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), the National Center for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE) and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP). For local analysis, the ministry can draw on the annual reports of its 42 County School Inspectorates (CSIs).

Beyond the ministry, the independent National Institute of Statistics (NIS) plays a prominent role in the collection and management of education data. The NIS is responsible for all data reporting to Eurostat as well as for monitoring Romania's progress towards its Europe 2020 goals.

The distribution of roles and responsibilities for evaluation across these different bodies is not always clear. In some cases this means that useful analysis is not used as fully as it could be. For example, the annual CSI reports on school quality in their counties or ARACIP's research reports on education quality nationally do not contribute systematically to system evaluation.

**Figure 5.1. System evaluation in Romania**




### *Tools for system evaluation*

System evaluation is the use of multiple tools to develop an overall view of educational performance. It provides the public with information on how the education system is performing, for accountability, and policy makers with insights to inform policy decisions. Important tools for system evaluation include:

- indicator frameworks mapping out the collection of key monitoring information
- national and international assessments, and longitudinal analysis to monitor student outcomes
- qualitative information and analysis about the education system
- the evaluation of specific programmes and policies (OECD, 2013).

Romania has developed a number of these instruments in recent decades. It collects student performance data at multiple times while a student is at school, and the NIS provides national education indicators and SIIIR collect education data. The IES provides policy analysis and evaluation, while qualitative school evaluations are provided by CSIs and, since 2005, by ARACIP.

### *System-level indicators*

The NIS is the primary provider of national administrative data on education in Romania. Accession to the EU has supported improvements in Romania's statistical tools, and the NIS now collects data according to most of the key indicators collected internationally, as established by the UNESCO-OECD-EUROSTAT collection of educational data. Participation in the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey (EU-SILC) complements administrative data by providing information on education outcomes and enables longitudinal studies to be conducted.

The national education indicators managed by the NIS are now complemented by data provided by SIIIR. Established in 2013, SIIIR reflects an important improvement in the quality and reliability of MNESR's own data. It collects data on the school network, school infrastructure, individual students and is developing a component for data on individual teachers (e.g. their qualifications, professional experience and continuous professional development). The NIS and MNESR have worked together closely to develop SIIIR and to avoid duplicating data collection from schools. As the MNESR increases its capacity, it is expected in the future to be the only organisation responsible for data collection at the school and county level.

Importantly, SIIIR now collects individual student-level data for the first time in Romania. It uses a unique student identifier (ID) which in the future should make it possible to connect student assessment and examination results from the NCAE with individual student data in SIIIR. This would provide data for enhanced analysis of student outcomes. However, at present no information on students' socio-economic background is collected through SIIIR or student assessments. Over time, SIIIR will also offer the possibility to conduct longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis of student outcomes.

### *Student assessments*

Romania's 2011 Education Law introduced a new annual national assessment for system-monitoring in Grade 4, the last year of primary education. Romania had previously conducted sample-based assessments for system-monitoring in Grade 4 at roughly three-year intervals between 1995 and 2008.

While the Grade 4 assessment is set out in the law as a system-monitoring, sample-based assessment it has not been implemented in this way. The assessment is marked at the school level, which means that the marking process lacks the standardisation necessary to ensure consistently reliable data to monitor student learning in one year across different schools or counties, or over time. In 2015 it was also administered to the full student cohort. This decision was based on the objective of collecting individual student results for each grade when a national assessment or examination occurs. Following the assessment, students and parents receive a two page report indicating the questions that were answered correctly, partially correctly and incorrectly on one page and a short text on their strong points and areas for improvement on the second page. The NCAE produces a national report analysing student responses by question.

Unlike earlier versions, the current assessment is not accompanied by a questionnaire to collect contextual data. While the national report provides results broken down by county and urban-rural areas for each item, there is no overall breakdown or analysis for the whole assessment by such factors, and it does not analyse other key background factors such as gender or socio-economic group.

Internationally, Romania has participated in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2006 (and also in 2000). It also participated in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) until 2011, when participation ended due to lack of funding. Such assessments provide Romania with international benchmarks and trend data to compare their students' performance over time. International assessments are accompanied by student, parent and school questionnaires, providing extensive contextual information that is not collected via national surveys. Little use is currently made of international assessment results for system-monitoring purposes, although the IES conducted an analysis of how students answered individual questions in TIMSS and PIRLS to provide teachers with insights on common student errors. These insights were also used by the IES in its co-ordination of the new curriculum's development.

### *Feedback from parents, teachers and students*

Romania does not run national surveys of parents, teachers and students but surveys form part of school self-evaluations. Romania asks its students for written feedback more frequently than most OECD countries. In PISA 2015, 93% of Romanian students were in schools whose principals reported that their students had been requested to provide written feedback on lessons, teachers or resources, compared to an average of 69% of students across OECD countries (OECD, 2016). However while this information is available at the school level it does not seem to be linked to critical self-reflection (see Chapter 4). Neither is it linked to national reporting on stakeholders' perceptions of the education system.

Since 2013, the NCAE has been responsible for surveying Romania's teachers as part of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). TALIS asks teachers and school leaders about their roles including appraisal and feedback, development and support, teaching practices and the classroom environment, school leadership, and self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

### *School performance efficiency index*

ARACIP has been developing an "efficiency index" of school performance since 2009 (Box 5.2). This index is a contextualised attainment model that measures a school's actual results with the school's "expected" or "predicted" results based on its characteristics, and its student and teaching body. The index identifies schools that are achieving better results than would be expected given their background. The index is not used by the MNESR in any systematic way although the President recently awarded the Order of "Merit for Education" Knight to the top-ranking rural school in the efficiency index.

**Box 5.2. ARACIP's efficiency index**

In 2009, ARACIP began developing a contextualised attainment model to take account of the factors that may have a strong influence on students' learning outcomes. The data are collected directly from the schools by ARACIP, and since 2014 the collection has taken place exclusively online. The index was first piloted in 2011 in 1 023 schools across all levels - kindergartens, primary, gymnasium and high school. The methodology was further revised and the index was applied to another 1 300 schools in 2014. In 2016 a ministerial decision confirmed the intention to extend the index to the remaining schools that have not yet been included in the pilot index.

The index is calculated at the school level and currently incorporates input indicators for:

- **Family background**: for example, the percentage of children from families with low income, parents' education in number of years and the average commute time between home and school.
- **Education environment**: for example, if the school is located in a socio-economically disadvantaged area, the number of school shifts and the average number of pupils per class.
- **Infrastructure**: for example, the availability of basic utilities such as water and electricity, and the availability of classroom furniture such as desks.
- **Equipment and teaching aids**: for example, the number of books in the school library, the number of computers, and the number of computers with Internet connection per 100 pupils.
- **Information communication technology (ICT)**: the level of ICT use in the school.
- **Human resources**: for example, the percentage of qualified teachers, new teachers, and the average teacher-pupil ratio.

Expected and actual results are measured through the following indicators:

- **Participation**: the average number of absences per pupil, the percentage of students dropping out and the percentage of students repeating a grade.
- **Results**: the distribution of average classroom assessment marks at the end of the school year, the average results in the Grade 8 and baccalaureate national examinations, and average results in the competence certification exam for vocational schools.

When a school receives its quality certificate following an ARACIP evaluation it also receives its performance against the efficiency index criteria and its overall 'index' of efficiency. Where this value is higher than 1, it indicates that a school is achieving better results than other schools functioning in similar conditions and with similar resources.

*Source*: Novak, C. and Ș. Iosifescu (2015), "Rapoarte de cercetare ARACIP Vol. I / 2015 Influența evaluării externe asupra calității educației" [ARACIP Report on the Impact of External Evaluation], ARACIP, Bucharest.

### *Qualitative reviews*

Romania collects a wealth of information about what happens in classrooms and school quality through its external school inspections. The CSIs conduct evaluations of the schools within their county, with each school being evaluated approximately every four or five years and ARACIP performs recurrent evaluations of all schools nationally on a five-year cycle. The Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate within the MNESR has inspected a sample of schools annually since 2011, (and also prior to the mid-2000s). The CSI and MNESR school evaluations evaluate the same areas whereas the ARACIP criteria differ in some areas. Broadly, all look at issues of institutional

capacity, educational efficiency and quality managmenet but there are some key areas that are not covered by either framework, such as the outcomes of students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds (see Chapter 4).

Each CSI produces an annual report that includes a summary of the individual inspectorate's top priorities and general conclusions from the inspections it has conducted that year. The Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate's school inspections result in indivdiual school-level reports and recommendations for decision makers in MNESR (see Chapter 4).

ARACIP produces two kinds of report. Its annual activity reports make recommendations on how it can improve its own functioning and efficacy and how schools can improve their quality, and also sometimes makes recommendations to the MNESR and the CSIs. It also produces general reports looking at the quality of education nationally. In recent years, European Social Funds have enabled further reports: in 2013 ARACIP reported on the the development of the concept of quality in Romania's schools, and in 2015 a thematic report was produced on quality in rural schools based on ARACIP's findings from its internal and external school evaluations (ARACIP, 2013, 2015). The main audience for ARACIP's reports are the MNESR, CSIs and schools, and the reports make specific system-level observations and recommendations to each of these organisations.

### *Policy evaluations*

The IES is the primary source of analysis and policy evaluations on education in Romania, for both the ministry and the public. It analyses NIS indicators for the State of Education report, and is an important source of analytical capacity in Romania's education system. It analyses the feasibility of new policies, for example the challenges and opportunities of moving to a school-based curriculum. The IES has also provided in-depth analysis on key challenges facing Romania's education system, such as out-of-school children, developed in co-operation with the United Nations International Children's Emregency Fund (UNICEF) (UNICEF, 2012). It also looks at the impact of policies, such as the integration of the Preparatory Grade into compulsory education, and it will evaluate the implementation of the new curriculum whose development it is leading. However neither the IES nor the MNESR systematically conduct post-implementation policy evaluations. As a member of the European Network of Education Councils, it has the opportunity to discuss and learn from other European councils that advise their governments on education.

## Policy issues

Institutionally, Romania's education system has made great strides in recent decades. It has established an examinations and assessment centre, the NCAE; an independent institution for quality assurance in schools, ARACIP; and is improving its data quality to meet international standards. However critical challenges remain. The system's actors and resources have not been consistently directed towards the achievement of clear national education goals, leading to constant policy changes and undermining accountability. This has also meant that existing resources have not been used as effectively as they might be to monitor the education system and identify improvements.

Raising educational outcomes for students from all backgrounds will require consistent efforts over the medium to long term. The current consideration to develop a

new law for education and the "Educated Romania" initiative create an opportunity to develop an inclusive national vision. It is crucial that this is complemented by transparent, reliable progress reporting and expanded data collection. Improved public reporting will help to strengthen public accountability, creating clear incentives for actors across the system to work together to achieve tangible progress against national goals. The overall limit in school resources and inequities in resource distribution make improving the transparency and availability of information on school resources important. This information will enable more effective targeting of resources to disadvantaged schools for improved equity, and also strengthen accountability of resource use.

Romania can also do more to exploit the information that it has. Making better use of data will help to focus evaluation and assessment more towards improvement. County and school-level leaders can be and are powerful agents of local change, but they need better support and more accessible data so that they can identify appropriate improvements to support better student outcomes.

## Policy Issue 5.1: Strengthening strategic planning

Romania's 2011 Education Law set high-level national goals for education, but these have not been accompanied by an implementation plan or a monitoring framework to put them into practice. Romania now has national strategies linked to the achievement of its EU 2020 targets and key challenges in Romania, such as the National Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving (Box 5.1). However the externality of these strategies and their fragmentation means that they cannot replace a comprehensive national vision and strategy for Romania's education system. At the same time constant political change in Romania, with on average, a new minister approximately every nine months since 1989, has led to frequent policy changes. Without strong strategic planning to ensure continuity, it has so far proved difficult to establish a consistent approach to tackling the persistent challenges of access, quality and equity.

Strategic planning refers to the setting of short-, medium- and long-term objectives, and creating a plan with actions to achieve them (OECD, 2014b). In OECD countries, strategic public management involves: setting a vision, strategy and clear goals which provide meaningful performance expectations; regular monitoring, analysis and reporting of results; and acting on results and holding government organisations and individual managers accountable for their performance (OECD, 2014a).

### *Developing a national strategy for education*

Romania is currently considering a new national law on education. At the same time, the President has launched a three-year "Educated Romania" initiative, to identify a long-term vision and strategy for education. Given the mixed implementation of the 2011 law and the relative weakness of strategic planning in Romania, these initiatives are to be welcomed. In particular, conducting a public consultation to develop national objectives and a long-term strategy to achieve those objectives is an essential first step to coherent and consistent reform.

Successful policy implementation requires that all stakeholders assume ownership of the policy and perceive it to be legitimate, both in the short and long term (Burns et al., 2016). This means that it will important to ensure that any new education law is developed inclusively. Romania's own recent history underscores the importance of collective ownership. In 2007 all the political parties came together to sign the

Pact for Education which outlined eight objectives for the education system. These were reflected in the subsequent 2011 Education Law. However, many fundamental parts of the 2011 Education Law are still in the process of being implemented, or have been reversed by amendments.

One explanation for this is that neither the pact, nor the law itself, were underpinned by genuine consensus among the political parties themselves, and that few beyond central government were part of the discussion. The OECD review team heard suggestions during interviews that there was not enough time for consultation, discussion and development, with the law being rushed through. The repeated amendments also suggest that the Romanian system was not ready, either philosophically or practically, to implement the measures set out in the 2011 law.

### *Building collective ownership and legitimacy*

Developing a strategy that will be more successfully implemented than the 2011 Education Law requires a genuinely open public consultation. If actors understand and value a strategy's goals they will be more inclined to assume responsibility for its implementation (Burns et al., 2016). This creates challenges on two levels. First, it implies engaging all education actors: school leaders, teachers, students, parents, academics and non-governmental organisations. This will help to ensure that the strategy is informed by the different and varied contexts in which students learn across the country. The approach taken by "Educated Romania" to organise themed events throughout the country seems a good step towards creating an open discussion informed by the educational realities of each county.

Second, it will be important to build the strategy's legitimacy among political parties and society. This is essential to ensure consistent implementation and avoid the strategy being amended and re-amended as the 2011 law was. It will be important to provide evidence to support a clear rationale for the directions set out in the strategy, to create an objective discussion that goes beyond political affiliations. It will also be important to highlight education's contribution to national development objectives, such as improving competitiveness, growth and social and economic convergence with the rest of the EU. Romania could also consider using non-politically aligned experts to oversee the national debate and national strategy development, to encourage objectivity and strengthen the link to national development.

### *Setting long-term goals to ensure continuity*

The first step in translating the new strategy and law into a practical implementation plan is to set out a few clear goals critical for national development, like improving education access, equity and quality. These goals will provide clear objectives to report against to help ensure continuity over the medium to long term. This would help to address the current challenge of discontinuity linked to political change by ensuring the overall focus of the education system remains unchanged despite government changes. Using simple goals with measureable, time-specific targets (see below) is essential to help ensure that each government's commitment to these goals is not only rhetorical but measured in terms of impact.

A long-term approach is important in the field of education since reform can take years to take hold and yield results. Many countries establish new strategies over 10-15 year periods, with periodic reviews and space for appropriate adjustments to ensure they continue to be relevant. Given the experience of the 2011 law, and the frequent

changes in education leadership that have been common in Romania, establishing an agreed adequate timeframe will be critical. One country that has taken a very comprehensive approach to setting national goals and integrating them into system evaluation is Australia (Box 5.3).

**Box 5.3. Australia's Melbourne Declaration**

The Melbourne Declaration was agreed by all the Australian territories' education ministers in 2008. It provides two goals, one based on quality and equity, and another setting out the kind of young Australians the schooling system should nurture: successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

These goals provide a framework for national education for 2009-18. They also provide the basis of measuring performance nationally, as they were translated into national performance measures in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia. This includes the National Assessment Program that covers national and international assessments to measure student achievement. The performance measures are reported against annually in the National Report on Schooling in Australia.

*Source*: ACARA (2015), *Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2015*, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

### *Aligning evaluation and assessment with the new vision*

Once national objectives have been decided, other policies for evaluation and assessment should be reviewed to ensure that they are all working to achieve the same goals. The different parts of an evaluation and assessment system – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation – will have the most positive impact when they are aligned and focus coherently on improving student learning (OECD, 2013).

The 2005 Quality Law and the 2011 Education Law provide elements of an evaluation and assessment framework, but the policies and practices that they have created do not always consistently support their own goals. For example, the Education Law provides for individualised student learning and feedback as a central part of student assessment but it does not set out a role for formative assessment which is an integral part of student feedback and engaging students in their own learning (see Chapter 2).

The development of a new national strategy creates the opportunity to address this by recognising the role of evaluation and assessment in improving student learning and clarifying the purposes of its different parts to avoid inconsistencies. This would support a shift in evaluation and assessment from reporting and compliance towards using results and information to identify and plan improvements. Using standards – for student learning through performance standards, and teaching and school standards – will help to ensure that evaluation and assessment coherently supports quality teaching and improved student learning (see Figure 0.2 in the Assessment and Recommendations).

In Romania, this would mean that student assessment should therefore recognise not only the role of central assessments and examinations but also leave space for teacher-based assessment and the development of teachers' assessment literacy. Teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation should focus on encouraging teachers and schools to engage in critical self-reflection to identify development needs. Finally, system evaluation needs to

draw on the full range of available information and use this as the basis for policy changes and adjustments where appropriate.

### *Transparent monitoring and progress reporting against national goals*

It will be important for Romania to establish transparent mechanisms for progress monitoring for two reasons. First, progress monitoring is essential for strategic planning. It translates high-level national goals into time-specific, measureable targets. Regularly collecting information on implementation against these targets provides feedback that the government can use for continuous adaptations rather than waiting until the evaluation stage at the end (Burns et al., 2016). Second, regularly and publicly reporting progress supports accountability by creating the means to hold the government accountable for progress achieved, or not achieved. To ensure that reporting leads to broad public engagement, it will be important to ensure that it is accessible and easily understandable for the average member of the public. For example, although the State of Education report currently analyses key educational challenges in Romania such as early school leavers, it has not been published to a regular and predicable schedule (see below), which undermines the public's ability to be able to draw on it, and its ability to provide a regular, anticipated contribution to the public debate on education.

#### *Developing indicators for progress monitoring and reporting*

The national goals set out in the strategy should be accompanied by measurable, time-specific targets and indicators for transparent monitoring and progress reporting. Experts should be involved in the development of the indicators to ensure that they are realistic and methodologically sound. Developing an indicator framework that maps out the targets and appropriate indicators would help Romania identify where further indicator development or data collection is required, such as key individual data on student background and teachers, which are currently underdeveloped in SIIIR. The framework should draw on both quantitative and qualitative sources. It should also exploit valuable information which is currently underused for system-monitoring, such as CSI and ARACIP reports on county and national school quality.

#### *Making the State of Education report an authoritative source of information on system performance*

The State of Education report is the principal reporting tool for the education sector. However it does not seem to inform decision making (World Bank, 2010). This reflects lack of capacity within the ministry to use the information (see Policy Issue 5.3) but also the fact that the report does not provide an authoritative perspective on national education. It is based on a limited set of inputs that include NIS' national education indicators, and results from the Grade 8 and Grade 12 baccalaureate national examinations. However it does not systematically draw on the findings from the national assessment for system-monitoring in Grade 4. The report now includes some data, such as the number of inspections conducted over the year by CSIs, ARACIP, and the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate, which is positive. However it could go further by discussing the conclusions of the school evaluation bodies, such as the overall factors that might be hindering school improvement, findings from the ARACIP reports on school quality and the ARACIP efficiency index. Including this kind of information on learning outcomes, and the learning environment would increase the report's value as an accountability tool and resource for policy makers and the public by highlighting key challenges that schools face in improving learning outcomes.

There are efforts to improve integration of some of this information into MNESR reporting. A World Bank-sponsored project aims to harmonise the format of the CSI reports with the national State of Education report, and include more CSI data in the latter. This would help the report to provide a more balanced perspective on education in different regions. To reinforce school evaluation the report could provide an overview on school quality, by drawing on CSI and ARACIP information that is seldom used at the moment (see Chapter 4).

One important source of information about an education system is the views of stakeholders. Romania does conduct student and parent surveys as part of the school self-evaluation process. Student attitudes to learning are also collected as part of PISA. However, this information is currently not used to monitor the system. Romania could consider how this information could be reported more systemically in the State of Education report, since it could provide important insights into the learning environment, which would be especially useful in Romania given its high levels of student dropout. In other countries it is an integral part of annual reporting on the education system. For example, Norway's annual education system report, the Education Mirror, uses its national Pupil Survey and PISA data to monitor information about student-teacher relationships, student motivation, the levels of home support that students receive and student well-being (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2014).

A clear and predicable reporting schedule is important for the transparency and perceived reliability of results. Acording to the MNESR, the State of Education report should be published and presented to the parliament at the beginning of the year by the MNESR. However, in recent years it has not been published because it did not receive approval from the incoming education minister. Inconsistencies in the reporting schedule undermine transparency and accountability.

### *Enhancing the transparency and accessibility of reporting*

System-level evaluation results in Romania are spread across different websites and agency reports. If a member of the public wants to see how Romania is progressing in reducing early school leaving they have to consult the State of Education report on the ministry's website. But if they want to see how primary students performed in the system -monitoring evaluation in Grade 4 they have to consult the NCAE's report on its website.

If the public are to be able to monitor the government's progress against national education goals the accessibility of system-level data should be improved by concentrating system results on a single website. For now, this could simply mean ensuring that the State of Education report is published to a regular, predetermined schedule prominently on the ministry's website. Access to other system-monitoring information could be facilitated by posting direct links to NCAE reports, and ARACIP's annual reports and efficiency index from the same place.

In the future, Romania might develop a more sophisticated single-window, user-friendly website where the public can access, navigate and manipulate system-level results (Box 5.4). Such efforts would also help to improve the openness and accessibility of system-level information for other external audiences, such as researchers and civil society. In particular, Romania should make efforts to ensure that system level data, such as national assessment results, are fully available and accessible for third party analysis. The analysis produced by external actors could provide new insights and help to promote the role of data and evidence in the public debate on education.

**Box 5.4. Creating accessible websites for education data**

In New Zealand the Education Counts website provides information on education research and statistics. The website is open to all audiences and brings together a wide range of demographic and contextual information, statistical information on educational participation and performance, and analysis and research publications.

Quantitative and qualitative information on national objectives can also be brought together in a single navigable analytical tool, like the School Dropout Explorer developed by the Netherlands' Ministry of Education which presents school dropout information at national, regional, local and school level. Making such data available, especially in a form that is open, useful and reusable, supports transparency and can generate new insights through external researchers' analysis.

*Sources*: OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en;
Nusche, D.et al. (2014), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Netherlands 2014*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264211940-en.

## Policy Issue 5.2: Aligning system-monitoring to educational priorities

Romania has made significant improvements to system-monitoring in recent years EU accession has driven improvements in the reliability and quality of data to meet international standards and student-level data are now collected nationally. However, changes in policy direction and the absence of a coherent approach for system- monitoring and improvement means that these very important tools are not used as effectively as they might be for monitoring national educational priorities. This includes the current Grade 4 assessment which could become a powerful tool for system-monitoring if it were standardised and combined with background questionnaires. While the breadth and quality of data collection has improved significantly, further expanding coverage to include student background, school resources, processes and context, will make it possible to analyse how student background and learning environment are shaping student outcomes in Romania. Finally, more transparent monitoring of resources will help to provide the basis for better allocation of funds linked to need, helping to improve equity.

### *Making better use of the Grade 4 national assessment for system-monitoring*

In 2015, Romania conducted a new Grade 4 national assessment. According to the 2011 Law the assessment should be sample-based and used to assess the primary education system. In reality however, the design and the format of the Grade 4 assessment is the same as those in Grades 2 and 6. This means that marking is not standardised, as being marked by teachers undermines its ability to provide reliable information that can serve as the basis for system-monitoring.

Such information is very important for an education system. It provides feedback on how students are learning and enables governments to monitor changes in student learning across years. It is especially important when governments are implementing policy changes, as Romania is with its new curriculum, to provide information on how those changes are being implemented in classrooms and their impact on student learning. The IES, in co-operation with the ministry and NCAE, is planning to assess students' competencies at the end of primary in 2017, to monitor implementation of the new curriculum. While this should provide helpful insights it remains a pilot exercise for the moment, and will not collect the background information for equity monitoring that a

system-monitoring assessment can. Given the disparities in student outcomes in Romania and the current lack of national monitoring on how contextual factors are affecting students' learning outcomes it remains important that there is a standardised system monitoring tool. For Romania to develop a powerful system-monitoring assessment it will need to improve the reliability of its Grade 4 assessment through standardisation, ensure the continuous development and quality of the assessment's items and report against national expectations of student learning.

### *Standardisation*

National assessments for system evaluation like the Grade 4 assessment provide information on how students are learning across the country. They can also highlight differences in learning by region or among different groups of students. It is therefore essential that they are reliable, to ensure accurate information on student learning. Countries ensure reliability by standardising what students are tested on, and how their responses are marked.

In Romania, the content of the Grade 4 assessment is standardised. All Grade 4 students take the same test which is established centrally by the NCAE. However, marking is not standardised. Marking follows the same procedures for all the national assessments, which were designed to encourage school ownership of the process and results. The NCAE provides standard guidelines but tests are marked within each school and the school provides their results to the NCAE through an electronic platform. There is no external marking or moderation. This is appropriate for a diagnostic assessment where the data are intended for classroom use to support adjustments in individual learning, but it is not appropriate where the data are intended to support inferences on the performance of the education system. A national system-monitoring assessment would provide key information to monitor learning outcomes and equity in Romania but if the Grade 4 assessment is to be used as such, then its marking procedures will need to be more rigorously standardised.

### *Reverting to a sample-based test*

Romania might also reconsider its decision to extend the Grade 4 assessment to the full cohort. Sample-based tests are often considered to be preferable for system-monitoring since they are less costly to run and help to avoid any association of high stakes, and yet have the potential to assess learning outcomes with depth and breadth across the curriculum (OECD, 2013). These are especially important considerations in Romania. In a system where there is already significant external high-stakes testing, another assessment for the whole cohort risks having high stakes attached to it too. Furthermore, the NCAE already runs a large number of external tests with limited resources. Reducing the scale of the Grade 4 assessment to a sample-based test would free up some of its capacity so that it can focus on ensuring the quality and reliability of the assessment, and developing background questionnaires (see below).

To enable analysis of the factors shaping students' educational outcomes, the sample should be designed so that it is possible to compare schools in different counties, across urban and rural settings, and students from different backgrounds including ethnicity, mother tongue language and socio-economic group.

### *Reporting against national standards*

Currently, the results of the Grade 4 assessment are reported nationally, giving the share of students who responded correctly to individual questions, with each item linked to learning objectives. This information is important for understanding student performance across the curriculum and should continue to be provided. However, this does not provide policy makers and the public with the primary information needed from a system monitoring assessment, which is how well students are mastering what the country wants them to know overall. Reporting the Grade 4 results by the share of students meeting national learning standards would help to achieve this (see Chapter 2).

For example, this would mean reporting the share of students who can communicate in the Romanian language according to the national expectations for Grade 4 students, linked to the outcomes that are specified for the end of each education cycle in the curriculum framework. This would provide a simple message that could be easily interpreted by education actors, policy makers and the public so that they can understand the level of student learning in a given year, and track changes over time. This would also help national goal setting (see Policy Issue 5.1). The new national education strategy might include a goal to improve student learning outcomes, with a numerical target for the share of students who should have reached a "satisfactory" level in reading and writing, and mathematics by the end of primary education.

Australia uses national standards to communicate results on its national student assessment. The results for its National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy are reported against national minimum standards for each area that is tested. A national report indicates the percentage of students at, above and below national minimum standards, with performance broken down by gender, indigenous status, language background, geography, parental education and occupation (Santiago et al., 2011).

### *Ensuring the consistent quality of assessment items*

The assessment items used in the Grade 4 assessment seem to be well designed to assess students' competencies. The assessment covers two core subjects – Romanian language and mathematics - with each assessment linked to learning objectives from the curriculum. For example, in the case of communication in the Romanian language, learning objectives for comprehension and written expression are assessed, and these are further broken down into more detailed objectives. This seems to provide a good framework to link the assessment with the key competencies set out in the new curriculum.

The assessment currently uses a combination of multiple choice, closed format short answers and some open-ended writing tasks. This is in line with the types of items most commonly used in OECD and EU countries for national assessments (OECD, 2013). The questions require students to interpret and apply information from different contexts. In the future, Romania might consider further developing the assessment items by including questions that require students to draw on a range of competencies.

So that Romania's national assessment is able to continually develop and improve in line with international practice it will be important that the NCAE has technical capacity for modern test design. It should also have the opportunity to learn from the types of questions used in international student surveys such as PISA, which assesses students' application of knowledge and skills to interpret and solve real life problems (see Chapter 2).

### *Moving towards a matrix model of assessment in the medium term*

Once the Grade 4 national assessment is well established, Romania could consider introducing a sample-based national assessment for system-monitoring in lower secondary education in the medium term. This would provide information on student learning outcomes at multiple stages in the education system and for comparing student progress across grades. The lower secondary assessment could use a matrix model that tests different subjects in different years. This would make it possible to test a broad range of the curriculum (reflecting the increasing breadth of student learning in secondary education), while helping to avoid the assessment becoming associated with high stakes.

However, Romania should not simply introduce another assessment on top of the existing national assessments and examinations, which are already extensive. It would need to be developed in the context of an overall review of national testing and the structure of secondary education. In particular, the format of the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 might be revised to become more teacher-led to provide greater space and support for teachers to develop their assessment literacy (see Chapter 2).

## ***Improving the availability and use of contextual student data***

Romania collects comparatively little contextual information. Such information is invaluable for better understanding the factors shaping student outcomes, such as low levels of learning, and early school leaving. It would also help to provide better understanding of the learning and teaching environment overall.

### *Including a background questionnaire with the Grade 4 assessment*

The analysis of the Grade 4 national assessment results is currently limited to descriptive statistics that break down student performance by county and urban-rural areas. Romania could follow the practice of many OECD countries and use questionnaires as a part of its national assessment to obtain information about student background and attitudes. This could be used to help monitor the progress of particular groups of students who tend to perform below the national average, such as ethnic minorities, and to better understand the background factors that are associated with low educational performance and lack of motivation.

The questionnaire might collect information on students such as gender, socio-economic background, parents' level of education, profession, family support, area of residence and distance from school. It could also cover classroom instructional processes, such as the disciplinary climate, and information about the school context such as school resources, human resources and community size. Non-cognitive factors that deal with aspects related to attitudes to learning, such as truancy, engagement and motivation could also be included. The impact of such factors on student learning could be analysed annually in the national report on the assessment's results and the main conclusions presented in the annual State of Education Report (see Policy Issue 5.1).

### *Connecting information on student outcomes and background in SIIIR*

The development of SIIIR also provides opportunities to expand the availability of contextual data, but this will require it to be better targeted at those factors that influence student and school performance. So far, the information it collects on school infrastructure is the most developed and includes very detailed data on material resources. The information it holds on students is much more limited. For students, it includes their

IDs (which is common to the NCAE), and personal details such as their name, gender, nationality, mother tongue and the classes that they attend. In 2016 it included their results, if applicable, from the Grade 8 and Grade 12 baccalaureate mock examinations for the first time. The teacher component is equally limited for the moment. It includes a unique ID for each teacher, and their personal details such as their name, gender, date of birth and email address.

SIIIR plans to expand the information it collects on students and teachers. It should prioritise ensuring the systematic collection of central examination results, and then expanding the collection of student background information, such as implementing plans to collect data on the distance that a student travels to school and the average income per family member.

### *Developing ARACIP's efficiency index to monitor school performance*

The MNESR should consider ending its current ranking of high based on Grade 8 examination results since this is not an accurate indicator of school performance and encourages a perception of educational achievement that is focused solely on exam results (*Admitere*, 2016) (see Chapter 4). Instead, Romania should make greater use of ARACIP's contextualised attainment model of school performance (Box 5.2). This "efficiency index" provides much greater accuracy in measuring school performance as it helps separate out the contribution of an individual school to student outcomes from contextual factors that are beyond the control of teachers and the school (OECD, 2008). The MNESR should make more effective, systematic use of the ARACIP efficiency index by including its findings in the State of Education report and encouraging its use at county and school level as a means to better understand school performance.

## ***Improving the transparency of school funding to enable funds to be better targeted to meet school needs***

It is not only the overall underfunding of Romania's education system that is hindering educational improvement, but also disparities in resource allocation. Romania spends significantly less on students in rural areas and from disadvantaged socio-economic groups than on those in urban areas and from more advantaged socio-economic groups (see Chapter 1). Research on the new per capita funding formula has found that nearly half of the schools sampled in a disadvantaged area reported that their funding was insufficient to cover their needs (Fartusnic et al., 2014). The need for local government and families to compensate for a shortfall in national resources appears to compound, rather than alleviate, inequalities in funding. Improving the quality and equity of Romania's education system will require ensuring that schools in disadvantaged areas have sufficient resources to address the distinct needs of children from poorer and marginalised families.

### *Improving resource planning and use through more transparent data*

This will require better data on school resources, to inform more effective funding and school support policies. System-monitoring and evaluation should help to direct resources to support national priorities and goals, and evaluate whether they are being effectively and efficiently used. However it is unable to fully fulfil this function in Romania due to a lack of transparent financial data, especially at the local level. Romania's schools are funded centrally by a standard per student cost model, but there is also redistribution at county level if central funds are insufficient to cover teacher salaries in a school. This may result in

funds being taken away from schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, where the teaching costs are lower due to having less experienced teachers, and being given to schools with more experienced teachers and therefore higher teaching costs (Fartusnic et al., 2014). Schools may also receive additional funding from local authorities and parental contributions, which are not publicly recorded. This means that the MNESR lacks accurate information on schools' budgets.

Improving the reporting of local budgets to the central level would help the MNESR to track school resources and how they are being used. This is essential information that provides the basis for distributing resources more equitably to raise educational outcomes. It will also provide the basis for evaluating how effectively resources are being used to achieve national goals and understand the relationship between resourcing and learning outcomes across different schools and groups of students. Improving the tracking of resources would help to enhance integrity by making it possible to assess how far funds are being invested as intended.

### *Distributing resources more equitably*

Better data could help to improve the funding formula and might inform the design of additional compensation programmes. While the new per capita funding formula has improved the equity of resource allocation, it remains relatively simple and offers relatively limited compensation for characteristics of the student population which may affect their needs, such as economic disadvantage. Revising the formula to take greater account of the profile of a school's student body may help to create a more equitable distribution of resources.

Some OECD countries use special support programmes or "compensatory programmes" to direct additional resources to schools facing particular socio-economic disadvantage. These programmes may target areas or schools with a high share of students from a disadvantaged background (see Chapter 4 and Box 2.5 in Chapter 2). However the success of such programmes depends on local and school capacity to be able use resources effectively to support school development (OECD, forthcoming).

## Policy Issue 5.3: Improving use of results

Romania's evaluation and assessment system generates vast amounts of information from students, teachers and schools through testing, inspections and evaluations, but it makes limited use of it. The use of results is an essential part of system evaluation, since it provides feedback to better understand current performance and help to identify where and how improvements might be made. Making better use of results at all levels in Romania, within schools, counties and central government, will help to develop a more comprehensive understanding of current performance in the education system, and identify where improvements can be made.

### ***Making more effective use of results for decision making in central government***

It was indicated to the OECD review team more than once during its interviews that the use of data and evidence in decision making was rare in Romania. This finding is echoed by others. The World Bank found that the MNESR's use of information and analysis was too limited, and that it was not realising the potential of the evidence available as a key resource for policy making (World Bank, 2010).

### *Establishing a standard procedure for the use of evidence*

A priority for improving the use of results will be to ensure that available data and evidence are used in a framework for progress monitoring, and in key system reporting tools such as the State of Education report (see Policy Issue 5.1). However, ensuring that information is regularly reported will not always ensure that it is used for decision making. This might be encouraged by creating a standard procedure for key policy-making decisions. Such a procedure could use a standard template with a mandatory section to present the relevant available evidence for a particular policy, and to acknowledge any data or knowledge gaps.

### *Developing capacity in the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research*

Improving the use of data and evidence in decision making requires strengthening central capacity in the MNESR. The ministry's Public Policy Department is supposed to support the development and analysis of public policies and the strategic management of the MNESR. However, with only nine staff members, its capacity is taken up by the co-ordination and monitoring of the five national strategies developed in support of Romania's EU 2020 targets.

Encouragingly, one of the measures in the National Strategy to Reduce Early School Leaving is the creation of a "research group within MNESR to study educational reforms (including technology) and challenges specific to Romania" (MNESR, 2015). Other countries such as the Netherlands and New Zealand have created similar bodies in the past. The purpose of such bodies has been to collect, compile and analyse evidence, and make it available across their respective ministries of education so that it forms part of policy making (OECD, 2013). Given the currently limited use of data and evidence in policy making in Romania, the creation of such a research group would seem to be a welcome step.

### *Optimising the Institute of Educational Sciences as an analytical resource*

At central government level, the IES could be a critical resource for evaluation, but it is currently underexploited in this area. Its position outside the MNESR, with technical autonomy from the education authorities, provides it with some distance from political decision making, enabling rigorous data analysis for policy and programme evaluation. While the IES does provide some research and policy, its capacity is constrained by limited resources and the need to respond to ad hoc ministry requests.

The IES's ability to provide insightful research and policy evaluations would be helped by reinforcing its independence and capacity. This could be achieved by ensuring its work is focused on the activities set out in its four-year activity plan that is agreed with the ministry, and ensuring a multi-year budget that matches the plan. At the moment it is frequently pulled away from its own research activities to address requests from the ministry. Additional activities outside its plan should be limited to an absolute minimum and be fully co-ordinated across the ministry. The new research body in the MNESR discussed above could instead provide technical research capacity to meet the ministry's needs.

### *Clarifying the governance of the evaluation and assessment system*

Other changes to the roles of institutions recommended in this report will further support the development of more strategic, evidence-driven government. Strengthening the independence of the NCAE and its technical expertise in the development and analysis of student assessments and examinations would give the ministry more reliable data on student learning outcomes for systematic use in policy making (see Chapter 2). Establishing ARACIP as the primary school inspection body would provide the ministry with an authoritative account of school performance against a single set of national standards. Redefining the roles of CSIs would provide more consistent and real-time information on schools, helping to identify problems early, while supporting their continuous improvement. The ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate would become an arm of policy oversight, helping it to track how national policies are being implemented and make sure reforms take effect (see Chapter 4).

## ***Improving county-level use of results to support local improvement***

Given the direct relationship that CSIs have with schools, teachers and the local community, they are potentially important leaders for local improvement. However CSIs need accessible, relevant information, and technical support to help them use it, to be able to fulfil this role. Use of results by local actors is important if they are to develop locally relevant goals and objectives linked to county-wide visions of improvement which support national targets.

### *Setting expectations for CSIs*

There are currently no strong mechanisms for reporting or monitoring CSI activities, which leads to weak local accountability. The 2011 Education Law indicates that CSIs should produce an annual report regarding education in their county but there is no specification on how the report should integrate national objectives or the role of data and evidence. In the Czech Republic, each region is expected to evaluate its own education system, which is reflected in an annual report. These reports should look not only at regional education performance, but also evaluate how the objectives set out in the long-term plan for the individual region are being fulfilled (Santiago et al., 2012). Setting a clear requirement that CSIs develop county-specific objectives in support of national objectives, accompanied by regular progress reporting, would help to enhance local strategic planning and accountability in Romania.

### *Supporting CSIs to make better use of system evaluation results*

CSIs' use of student results data is currently limited to raw examination and assessment results. However, being able to monitor the overall learning outcomes of different groups of students across different schools is important for their work. ARACIP's efficiency index provides this kind of information and CSIs should be encouraged by the ministry to make greater use of it to monitor school performance.

Other countries have developed information management systems to make relevant school and student performance information available to schools and other education agents to encourage its use in self-evaluation and improvement (Box 5.5). Romania might consider how its current information management tools, including SIIIR, could make information on learning outcomes and learning environments easily accessible for CSIs, with the aim of enabling them to develop a clear understanding of the statistical profile of the schools that they are working with. For example, CSIs should be able to identify two

schools within their county with a similar share of students from a disadvantaged socio-economic group or whose mother tongue is not Romanian, and compare the learning outcomes of students across these schools. This would help CSIs to develop a more nuanced understanding of the schools in their county in order to target their support where it is most needed. It will be important that measures are taken to guard against such data being used for school ranking, such as not making the information in such systems publicly available.

**Box 5.5. SMART Australia**

New South Wales in Australia has developed the School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART). SMART provides information from national assessments and examinations, and from school-based assessment activities, to provide education agents with a wide range of diagnostic information on individual students. It allows users to identify strengths in student performance and areas for improvement. It is also possible to conduct analysis of educational outcomes and processes at different levels, from individual students to groups of students, cohorts, schools and the system as a whole.

*Source*: OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

### *Improving dissemination of results data to CSIs*

Improving how results are disseminated from the central to local levels would also help CSIs to interpret and make greater use of results data to support improvements. CSIs and the MNESR already attend an annual meeting at the beginning of the school year in Romania, which is helpful. The MNESR presents the national assessments and examinations, including how they are developed, and the national and local results, with the expectation that this information is cascaded down to schools and teachers. However, it was reported to the OECD review team during its interviews that this may not always happen effectively. It is important that the MNESR explores why this is the case, and perhaps consider moving to a less centralised process through more regional events and involving more local, operational actors. A reoriented Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate focused on overseeing policy implementation would be well placed to lead this work.

## ***Helping schools to make better use of system results for improvement***

Through data reporting, assessments, exams and school inspections, schools in Romania provide a huge amount of data to the system, but they receive very little information back. Unsurprisingly in this context, it was reported to the OECD review team during its interviews that schools see little value in these data, neither understanding why the information is being requested nor the value that it can add to their work. Data on student learning outcomes, student background, and student progress over time can provide valuable insights on school performance and identify areas for improvement. Better use of results in schools would be supported by ensuring that results are made available and accessible, and taking measures, including training, to develop capacity at the school level to act upon this information.

### *Providing more accessible information on student learning outcomes for schools*

Romania produces national reports following assessments and examinations. This means that schools have access to their own data and the aggregated national results. But a school's understanding of its performance would be helped by having more detailed information on their performance in relation to national learning expectations. For example, a school should be able to see the share of its students who have satisfactorily mastered key competencies compared with national averages, and be able to look at results according to students' socio-economic information, and to compare the school's results with those of other schools with similar or different statistical profiles. This would help schools to develop a more nuanced understanding of how their learning environments and teaching are shaping student learning. This information could feed into the school's reflection on its own performance, help it to set goals and plans for improvement, and to monitor progress as part of its self-evaluation.

Schools could be supported by a data management system where they can analyse their own data and identify schools with similar statistical profiles. Romania is planning to develop an application that will enable schools to download and manipulate their own data. It might draw on the experience of other countries as it does so (Box 5.6). An individualised school report could also be useful. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, schools that take the national assessment receive a detailed feedback report on student performance in relation to national averages (OECD, 2013).

**Box 5.6. Supporting schools to use and analyse their data**

A number of countries have developed information management systems to help education actors, including schools, to use data on learning outcomes and the learning environment more systematically to support improvement. Australia's has developed SMART (see Box 5.5) and Norway has developed its School Portal (*Skoleporten*). The School Portal is an online information tool that presents education monitoring information such as learning outcomes, learning environments, resources and basic school data. Part of the site is accessible to the general public, while another part is password protected, where schools and school owners can access more detailed information and benchmark themselves against national averages. Such tools could prove useful in Romania, to help teachers and schools draw greater benefit from educational data to develop a more comprehensive picture of learning outcomes for individual students, classes and schools as a whole.

*Source*: OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en.

Other countries produce individualised analyses of national assessment or examinations for different audiences, and support their use through dissemination events. In Slovenia, system-level results are packaged into different formats and analyses depending on the audience. For example, mathematics teachers may receive a specific report if the system-level results highlight issues of particular relevance for the improvement of mathematics teaching. The publication of results is accompanied by teacher training seminars and other dissemination activities to promote the wider use of assessment results. While Romania did provide this kind of analysis for TIMSS and PIRLS it was a one-off exercise and was performed on an international test. It would be useful for Romania to undertake this kind of work regularly for a national test based on its own curriculum.

### *Supporting school capacity to use results*

It is important that any new data tools are accompanied by appropriate training and guidance, so that schools have the analytical capacity to use them. In the United States, "data coaches" have provided some schools with technical expertise in the use of data, enabling schools to create easy-to-read data dashboards that make information more accessible to teachers (OECD, 2013).

CSIs have a key role to play in supporting better use of results within schools. In Australia, some provinces have created "data" posts – consultancy positions in performance analysis and reporting to support regions in using data to inform improvement (Santiago et al., 2011). As the CSIs move away from a control function and towards a more supportive function (see Chapter 4), consideration should be given as to how they can develop technical expertise to support schools in making better use of system data to support improvements. One option might be to create similar dedicated data roles within CSIs, and include this as part of the profile for CSI staff appointments in the future.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Improving system evaluation in Romania will benefit the whole education system. Developing a more strategic approach to national planning will provide a more consistent approach to tackling persistent challenges around access, equity and quality. Revising the Grade 4 national assessment to make it a more powerful system-monitoring tool will help to better understand student learning and what is affecting it. Finally, making results more accessible and supporting capacity to use the results will help education actors at the central, local and school levels identify and lead improvements in the teaching and learning environment.

### ***Recommendations***

### *5.1. Strengthen strategic planning*

**5.1.1. Develop a long-term national strategy for education.** The current discussion around a new education law and the Presidential initiative "Educated Romania", which launched a national debate on education, create an opportunity to forge a long-term vision and strategy for education. It will be important for Romania to develop collective ownership of the new strategy, to create national support to prevent the policy reversals the 2011 law suffered. Linking the strategy and new law to wider national development objectives and engaging independent experts in the strategy's development could help to build political consensus. Setting a limited number of goals over the medium term would support monitoring and accountability, and provide evidence on key priorities to inform policy making.

**5.1.2. Ensure the transparency and accessibility of progress reporting.** Romania needs to develop measureable, time-specific indicators for monitoring progress towards the national strategy's goals so that the government can be held accountable for results and has the information it needs to design effective policies and allocate resources. Indicators should be carefully developed, with the involvement of statistical and educational experts to ensure that they are methodologically sound and, where they are focused on learning, that they reflect the breadth of student learning to avoid the use of a narrow measure focused solely on academic achievement.

Developing the State of Education report so that it draws on a broader range of system-monitoring information will help it to become a more authoritative source of information on the education system's performance, and better inform decision making.

**5.1.3. Clarify the role of evaluation and assessment in supporting national learning.** Romania's evaluation and assessment system has many positive practices that support student learning, but these tend to be nascent and are undermined by the weight of national examinations and evaluation for compliance. Setting out clearly in the national strategy how evaluation and assessment can support Romania's learning goals would help to provide greater coherence to its positive practices and ensure all aspects of the system are working together to support improvements in teaching and learning.

### *5.2. Align system-monitoring to educational priorities*

**5.2.1. Standardise the Grade 4 national assessment and introduce background questionnaires to create a system-monitoring tool.** Romania currently lacks its own system-monitoring assessment which means that it does not have the means to reliably measure learning outcomes against national expectations or to judge the impact of policy changes on teaching and learning. Romania should standardise the marking procedures for the Grade 4 assessment so that it provides reliable system-wide data on students' learning outcomes. Introducing a background questionnaire as part of the Grade 4 assessment will help Romania to better understand the impact of contextual factors on student learning. Finally, Romania should consider moving to a sample-based assessment to help avoid any stakes becoming attached to the assessment, in a high-stakes national examination culture. Sample-based assessments also make it possible to cover a broader range of subject domains, knowledge areas and competencies.

**5.2.2. Expand the data that is collected on student outcomes and background in the Integrated Information System for Education System in Romania (SIIIR).** Alongside the new background questionnaires for Grade 4, this would also provide the basis for a better understanding of how contextual factors are shaping student learning and more effective policy responses.

**5.2.3. Improve information on school resource allocation and use**. This is important to enhance the effectiveness of resourcing policies, and in particular to develop policies to reduce the wide disparities in funding available to schools (for example through a review of the per capita funding formula and introduction of additional targeted programmes for disadvantaged schools). Romania also needs better data on school resources to support further decentralisation and greater overall investment in education, both of which this review considers will be important to improvements in outcomes**.**

### *5.3. Improve the use of results at central, county and school level*

**5.3.1. Invest in central government capacity for analysis of the education system.** Expand the number of staff and analytical capacity in the Ministry's Public Policy Department and proceed with the creation of a research group in the ministry, as set out in the National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving. This will enhance central government's analytical capacity to use the information produced by the evaluation and assessment system for system evaluation. Ensure that the IES has sufficient independence and resources to deliver its research programme so that it can devote itself to providing research and policy evaluations that provide evidence for policy making.

**5.3.2. Improve the use of system-level information at county level to support improvement and accountability.** Set the expectation that CSIs will adopt county-specific targets linked to national targets, with regular progress reporting to central government. Develop information management systems for CSIs so that they can better understand the statistical profile (e.g. school resources, student profile, teacher profile and learning environment) of the schools within their county and how this is affecting students' learning outcomes so that CSIs can target their support to schools most in need.

**5.3.3. Provide schools with more accessible information to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning.** Provide schools with information on their statistical profile and students' learning outcomes, so that they can analyse their own data and understand how the teaching and learning environment at their school is shaping students' learning outcomes in comparison with other schools.

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