

Evaluation of Teacher Education Institutions/ Programmes

Bernadette Forsthuber, European Eurydice Unit, Brussels
Isabelle de Coster, European Eurydice Unit, Brussels
Marion Steinberger, European Eurydice Unit, Brussels

The political context

In the context of the Lisbon process and the common objectives to be reached by 2010, the Commission set up an expert group in 2002 dealing with teacher education. The work undertaken within the context of this group has revealed a lack of comparable national data for measuring improvement in the area of teacher education.

Improving the education of (future and serving) teachers is one of the purposes of quality control. A number of recent national initiatives reflect that quality control in initial and in-service teacher education is actually an important issue on the political agenda in many European countries. This issue is also addressed more globally in the context of higher education within the follow-up of the Bologna process.

The European Commission Staff Working Paper on November 2004 proposed a plan to respond to this lack of comparable data in this area. In the short term, Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe¹, had to undertake a quick survey on the evaluation of teacher education institutions/programmes in Europe on the basis of official policy documents. More particularly, Eurydice was asked to analyse the extent to which regulations or practices for external and internal evaluation exist for institutions/programmes providing initial and in-service teacher education in European countries.

The scope of the survey

The scope of this data collection was to identify evaluation types which focus on the quality of the provision of teacher education and which - as a consequence - do not take only administrative controls and financial audits into consideration. Teacher education for primary and general secondary levels has been considered.

The first report which results are summarized here deals with official regulations or recommendations on the evaluation of

initial teacher education institutions and programmes.

This quick data collection is organised in several phases. The second report on the evaluation of in-service training will be published together with Report 1 beginning of 2006. The publication will be available in paper form as well as on the website <http://www.eurydice.org/>.

The results show that almost all countries considered have some kind of system for evaluating initial teacher education. However, the extent to which such evaluation procedures are regulated differs from one country to the next. The fact that some countries do not have very regulated procedures does not necessarily mean that they do not evaluate their systems at all.

In the majority of the countries, general regulations on the evaluation of higher education also apply to the evaluation of teacher education and specific regulations on the evaluation of initial teacher education programmes or institutions do not exist. Where they exist they normally apply only to a particular stage of initial teacher education (professional training, teaching practice, induction).

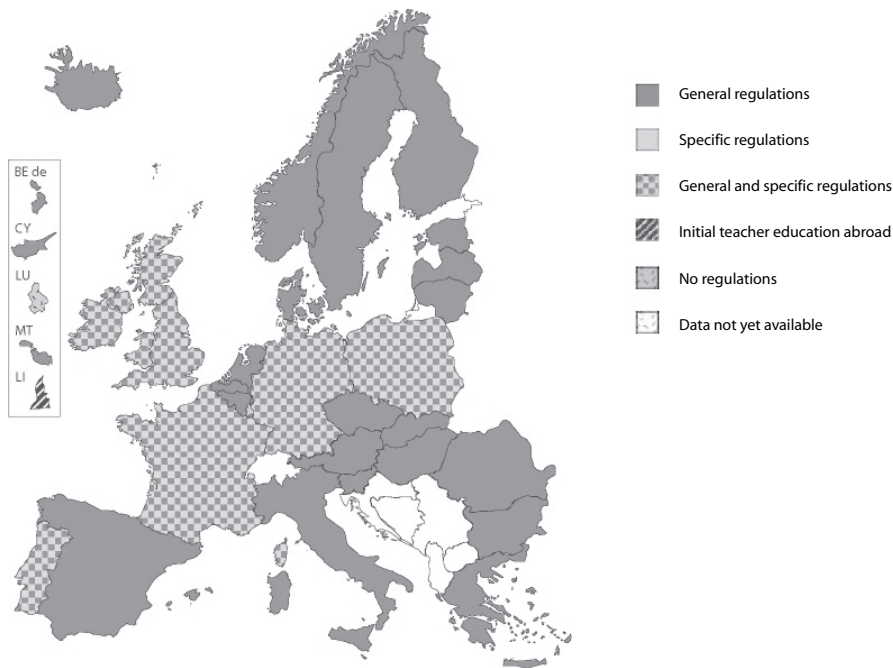


Fig 1. Official regulations for the evaluation of initial teacher education institutions/programmes for ISCED 1- 3, 2005/06

Explanatory note

ISCED 1-3 refers either to primary, general lower and upper secondary levels or to single-structure and general upper secondary education. Vocational education is excluded.

The extent to which these general regulations may take particular components into consideration and examine the quality of specific content in greater detail, largely depends on the documents from which evaluation criteria are derived.

Main features of external evaluation

External evaluation is compulsory or recommended in most of the countries covered by the survey. It is often carried out by an evaluation agency, special committee or an independent body (audit agency) acting on behalf of the public authorities. In only five countries, it is the ministry of education itself which is in charge of carrying out external evaluation.

In most countries, which have official regulations on this issue, evaluators are peers and/or evaluation experts. A few countries also mention inspectors with either a teaching background or an administrative background. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and Norway is it compulsory or recommended to include students in the team of external evaluators. In Germany, their involvement is optional.

The main documents that have to be used as a basis for the evaluation procedure are legislation on higher education and a list of evaluation criteria. The majority of countries also refer to one or several documents which deal specifically with teacher education, such as content guidelines or qualification standards for prospective teachers.

Ten countries use national indicators to draw up external evaluation criteria. These indicators deal for example with trainer/student ratios, student performance or the relation between the labour market and the availability of study places.

Almost all countries with regulations focus their evaluations on the content of teacher education curricula provided by individual institutions or programmes. Teaching and assessment methods are also considered in all countries.

Evaluation focuses more often on partnerships with schools than on the balance between general and professional training within initial teacher education or school placements. In the majority of countries, external evaluation takes account of student performance and, in over half of them, student attitudes and opinions.

External evaluation is normally based on a site visit. In the majority of countries, this includes interviews with the management and academic or administrative staff. Regulations also frequently provide for interviews with students.

The frequency of external evaluation varies widely from one country to the next. There are basically three categories:

- Fixed frequency : Depending on the country concerned, the fixed interval may range from one year to up to 12 years. However, in some countries this is the maximum amount of time after which an evaluation has to take place.
- Variable intervals: Frequency fixed by the evaluators and/or the institution evaluated. Such a situation can be encountered in 9 countries.
- Evaluation only in the case of accreditation of new institutions/programmes: very rare.

Main features of internal evaluation

Internal evaluation is either compulsory or recommended in most of the countries. However, it is in general less regulated than external evaluation.

The responsibility for coordinating internal evaluation lies mainly with the management of the institution or a special evaluation committee set up in the institution for this particular purpose.

In almost all countries, management, academic staff and students participate in the process . In several countries, external experts in evaluation may also be involved in the internal evaluation process, but if this is the case, it is mostly on an optional basis.

The criteria used are often the same as those used for external evaluation and they are as manifold (e.g. the content

of the teacher education curriculum, teaching methods, assessment practices, human resources management, student performance and the existing infrastructure). The scope of internal evaluation is very much conditioned by the needs of external evaluation. However, in several countries, there are no official regulations on this precise scope of internal evaluation.

In terms of frequency, internal evaluation is often linked to external evaluation, but may also occur more frequently. In 19 countries, the frequency of internal evaluation is determined by regulations. In 9 countries, no regulations on this issue exist. In the majority of countries, for which regulations exist, internal evaluation should take place annually. In seven countries, however, internal evaluation should only take place at least every three to ten years.

Use of external evaluation results

In the vast majority of countries, the consequences of external evaluation are regulated. In four countries only (the French Community of Belgium, Ireland, Austria and Finland), the consequences of external evaluation for institutions only marginally derive from regulations – if at all.

When the consequences of external evaluation results are regulated, they may relate in most cases to the accreditation or reaccreditation procedure, the funding received and the evaluation follow-up. In the case that an institution or programme does not satisfy all required quality standards, the main possible consequence of external evaluation is the organisation of a follow-up. This generally involves an obligation on the part of the institution to draw up a plan for improvement and fresh external evaluation after a given period of time, which varies from one country to the next.

In the majority of countries, the findings of external evaluation provide the basis for a decision regarding the accreditation or re-accreditation of institutions or programmes. This means determining whether or not an institution may be officially recognised as satisfying the conditions required for providing initial teacher education and awarding the corresponding qualifications. This is an important issue for the institutions because, theoretically, if the results are poor, a programme may be discontinued or an institution closed.

However, even if external evaluation results are used in the framework of an (re)accreditation procedure, it is not necessarily the main or the only aim of evaluation. The process of evaluation has evidently always the purpose of improving quality. In Lithuania, United Kingdom (England and Wales) and Norway, the results are used in a secondary way by bodies responsible for accrediting teacher education programmes or institutions.

In countries with (re-)accreditation procedures, if the findings of external evaluation result in refusal to (re-)accredit programmes or institutions, this decision may have a bearing on the public funding they are awarded.

There was no explicit question about the kind of impact the results of evaluation can have on funding, when the renewal of the accreditation of a programme is not given. It seems however, that the most common situation is a reorganisation of funding inside an institution or a faculty, with the amount of funding remaining stable.

Independently of the accreditation procedure, the level of funding may also vary in accordance with the level of quality observed during external evaluation, as for example in the case of the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium and in France, the public grant institutions receive for operational purposes is conditioned by evaluation results, and more

specifically by compliance to requirements.

In most countries where the results of external evaluation are used to inform (re-)accreditation decisions, conditional or temporary accreditation may be awarded in the case of non-compliance with accreditation requirements. This conditional accreditation is usually delivered for two or three years, and a follow-up is organised in the meantime. So there is an alternative to a decision about the possible closure of a programme.

Use of internal evaluation results

In a majority of countries, it is compulsory or recommended to draft a plan for improvement following internal evaluation. However, in around ten countries, there are no regulations concerning the implementation of such a plan following internal evaluation. This is due to the autonomy higher education institutions have in this respect. Such a situation can be observed in countries where internal evaluation is generally not compulsory and/or very little regulated.

Publication of results

Beyond the 'initial' use of evaluation results which may affect the institutions evaluated (as mentioned above, with regard to the award of accreditation, financing terms or the establishment of internal measures to improve quality), these findings may also be released for information to various players involved in the activities of the institutions or to the general public.

The results of external evaluations of individual institutions or programmes are published systematically in 18 countries. The external evaluation reports are in most cases published by the body responsible for external evaluation or by the ministry of education generally on its website.

Almost all countries also ensure, beyond the publication, that the findings are directly available to the management of institutions and their academic staff and students.

The findings of internal evaluation have to be published in the Czech Republic (in the case of annual internal evaluation), Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden. In other countries, it is optional or not mentioned in regulations, i.e. that institutions decide if they want to publish them or not. Like for many other aspects of internal evaluation, this could be a common practice even if it is not regulated.

Final remarks

Within the framework of a quick data collection it is of course not possible to go into much detail. The aim is to show the basic principles and policy intentions of such quality control systems which are in several European countries quite new and do not rely on many years of experience.

