

# **OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes**

## **Country Background Report for Austria**

**January 2012**

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## GLOSSARY

### ABBREVIATIONS

**BDG** = Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz = Civil Service Code

**BIFIE** = Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens = Federal Institute for Education Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System

**BMUKK** = Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture)

**Eurydice** = The information network on education in Europe by the European Commission

**IBW** = Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy)

**LDG** = Landeslehrer-Dienstrechtsgesetz = Service Code for Provincial Teachers

**PA** = Pädagogische Akademie (Teacher Training College – until 2006)

**PH** = Pädagogische Hochschule (PH, University College of Teacher Education) (from 2007 the PAs and PIs became PHs, getting university-like status in tertiary education)

**PI** = Pädagogisches Institut (in-service training institution – until 2006)

**QIBB** = Qualität in der Berufsbildung (Quality in Vocational Education)  
<http://www.qibb.at/de/home.html> (web-based quality framework)

**QIS** = Qualität In Schulen (Quality in Schools) [www.qis.at](http://www.qis.at) (web-based quality framework)

**skR** = Standardisierte, kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung – Standardized, Competence-oriented Matriculation Examination

**VWA** = Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit“ (pre-scientific paper)

### SCHOOL TYPES

**AHS** = Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen = Academic Secondary School

**AHS-Unterstufe** = Lower Level of Academic Secondary School,

**BHS** = Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen = Higher Technical and Vocational Colleges

**BMHS** = Berufsbildende mittlere und höhere Schulen, (Vocational Medium and Upper Level)

**Gymnasium** = Classical Academic Secondary School

**Hauptschule [HS]** = Lower Secondary school

**Neue Mittelschule [NMS]** = New Secondary School (comprehensive school for all 10 to 14-year-olds)

**Poly (Polytechnikum)** = Pre-vocational School

**Realgymnasium** = Academic Secondary School emphasizing Mathematics and Science

**Sonderschule** = Special Needs School

**Volksschule [VS, Grundschule]** = Primary School

**Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium** = Academic Secondary School emphasizing Economics

# 1 Executive Summary

## *Changes in System Control*

A new culture of evaluation is beginning to evolve within the Austrian school system. Opposed to a mere input-oriented control system until the beginning 2000s, the last years have witnessed a change towards a more output-oriented perspective. As a consequence of the (for Austria rather problematic) outcomes of the international performance assessments – especially TIMSS3 and PISA – and inspired by the constant publishing of the OECD indicators „Education at a Glance“, wide circles of education experts and politicians came to the conclusion that system control is supposed to impart information on the essential strengths and weaknesses of the educational system, based on reliable data about structures, processes and outcomes.

This perspective gained a central momentum in the year 2007 after a new Federal Minister for Education for education took office, promoting a more evidence based educational policy. This fact found its expression for example in the foundation of the Federal Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens) (BIFIE, 2008) and its assignment with the development, implementation and evaluation of educational standards, the development of a concept for a partly-centralised, standardised, competence-oriented maturation examination (Matura) and the implementation of a continuous system monitoring. Moreover, the BIFIE had been charged with the creation of the first national education report (published 2009). The national education report was supposed to give a valid database for the upcoming reform initiatives.

## *System Evaluation*

The new evidence-based perspective on the educational system becomes apparent in the framework for evaluation on the system level. There are strong elements of system evaluation, providing a data base as a foundation for a new form of system control:

- Austria's regular participation in international performance assessments PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, illustrating the performance of the Austrian education system in the international relation.
- beginning with school year 2011/12, the annual and comprehensive assessment of educational standards in the 4th and 8th grade. Educational standards and their regular assessment are a completely new tool for system evaluation in the Austrian school system. They are supposed to illustrate if and to what extent the schools meet their own objectives in performance and competence promotion.
- the new partly-centralised and competence-oriented maturation examination, presently in the preparatory stage and to be effected comprehensively in school year 2013/14 constitutes an important element of system evaluation. The systematic assessment of the examinations is supposed to provide relevant information on the acquired competences of the students at the end of upper secondary level.
- the regular elaboration of a national education report, intended at providing data and scientific analyses of the essential political sectors, preparing and supporting political decisions.

## *Evaluation of Schools*

The other levels of the evaluation system are currently less structured. The evaluation of single schools lacks for example distinct regulations equipping the quality development on this level with liability and consistency.

In general, there are currently three evaluation elements on the school level:

- self-evaluation of schools according to the guidelines on the internet portals QIS.AT (general school system) and QIBB.AT (vocational school system);
- external evaluation by the school administration. A regulation on the task profile of the school administration proposes a so called „proportional inspection“ , meaning the evaluation of schools featuring deficient or low credible quality development systems.
- a third, completely new element of school evaluation provides the annual assessment of educational standards. The standard tests in German and Mathematics (primary school) or German, Mathematics and English (8<sup>th</sup> grade) are aggregated on class and school level and are fed back to schools and teachers. These are „low stake“ feedbacks – meaning they are no official assessment of schools or teachers. The performance feedbacks are supposed to serve as starting points for quality development processes.

Formally, the schools are responsible for their own quality development by means of self-evaluation and data feedback. Only in cases where this autonomy does not lead to positive results, inspectors enter the scene providing an external perspective. However, this model still lacks liable and mandatory elements like a compulsory development of a school programme or committing minimum standards for self-evaluation. The standardised training of the school administration so far also remains a desideratum.

### *Evaluation and Teacher Appraisal*

Compared to the approaches at system evaluation and school assessment, a systematic evaluation of the teachers does not exist. Apart from extremely problematic cases, reported by parents and resulting in class visitations by the school administration, a formal evaluation of teacher performance is very scarcely effected. The headmasters/mistresses, as superiors of the teachers, enact their evaluative function very sporadically.

### *Students Assessment*

The assessment of students and their performances can be differentiated into three different procedures:

- the formative performance assessment by teachers in the course of the school year. This can be effected by means of grades for written and oral exams but also by less formalised procedures like objective-oriented assessments, self-evaluations, verbal assessments or student portfolios.
- the summative performance assessment in the mid-term or end term reports. These assessments are effected by the teachers based on a five grade scale. The actual configuration of grades is responsible for the student's moving up to the next grade.
- the results of the educational standards tests (starting 2012). Every student receives an individual feedback of his or her performance compared to the other student of his or her class or school or compared to all students of the same age. These feedbacks have a formative nature as they only serve as information. The educational standards tests have no effect on the performance assessment and the resulting qualifications.

### *The Significance of the Annual Educational Standards Tests*

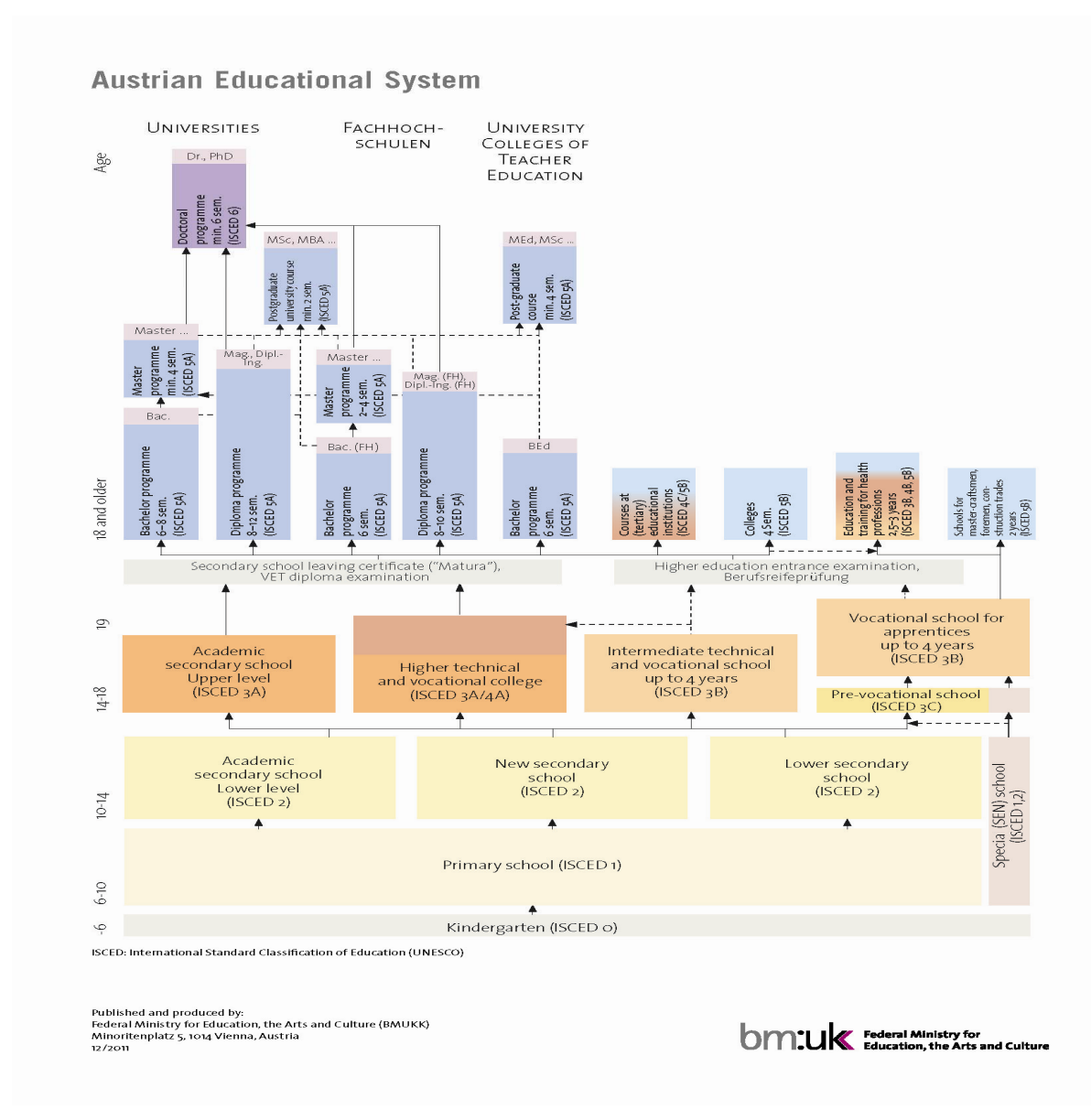
The evaluation system in general shows the significance of the future educational standards tests. At the same time it remains important to stress that these tests are planned by all means as „low stakes“ tests. They provide the different levels with information on quality and performance. There are no further grades or assessments connected to these results.



## 2 The main structural features of the school system<sup>1</sup>

1. School attendance is compulsory for all children permanently resident in Austria irrespective of their nationality, and lasts for nine years. Pupils are free to choose whether to attend a state or a private school, attendance of a state school, however, is free of charge. Compulsory schooling either starts with a pre-primary year at school or a four-year attendance of a primary school (years 1 to 4 of a primary or a special school). Years 5 to 8 may be completed at a lower secondary school, an academic secondary school, a primary school (upper bracket) or a special school (upper bracket). The 9th year may in turn be completed by attending a pre-vocational school, an academic secondary school or a vocational school or college. Pupils may choose among a variety of secondary academic vocational schools and colleges. The following table presents an overview of educational opportunities in the Austrian school system.

**Table 1: Educational opportunities in Austria (BMUKK, 2011)**



<sup>1</sup> Chapter one is a shortened and updated version of the publication "Improving School Leadership" (2007) - with kind permission from Michael Schratz & Katalin Pollack

## **2.1 SECTORS AND TYPES OF SCHOOL**

### **2.1.1 Pre-primary Year at School**

2. Nursery schools/kindergartens support families in care, formation and education of children at pre-school age and prepare the children for school enrolment. Children reaching the age of 5 prior to the 1st September of a calendar year are obliged to attend nursery school in their sixth year of life for at least four days per week to an extent of 16 to 20 hours. An earlier enrolment is voluntary. Children attending school prior to their sixth year of life are excluded from nursery school attendance.

### **2.1.2 Schools Providing General Education**

#### *Primary School*

3. Primary schools [Grundschulen] are designed to provide all pupils with the same elementary education. Special attention is being paid to the social integration of children with special needs. The objective of primary schools is to provide children with a basic and well-balanced general education which fosters their social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills and abilities. Compulsory schooling starts on the first of September following the child's sixth birthday. Children who celebrate their sixth birthday between September 1 (start of the academic year) and March 1<sup>st</sup> of the following year, may start primary school prematurely, provided they are mentally and physically mature enough to follow lessons and dispose of the necessary social skills to attend school. Depending on the number of pupils, there is one class for each primary school year. If there are not enough pupils to set up a class for each year, children of several years may be grouped in one class. In addition to that and depending on the necessities, primary schools are also requested to provide for a pre-primary year at school. In the pre-primary year there is no assessment of the child's performance, the annual report only states that the child participated in the non-assessed compulsory subject classes.

#### *Special School*

4. Special schools [Sonderschulen] are designed to promote and educate mentally or physically disadvantaged children, who are not able to follow lessons in primary or general secondary school, according to their special needs and to prepare them for integration into the world of employment. Special schools do constitute an alternative to integrated teaching of children in conventional schools. Education in Special schools covers the whole period of compulsory schooling.

#### *Lower Secondary School*

5. The general secondary school [Hauptschule] is designed to provide all pupils with a basic general education within a four-year period. Its purpose is to prepare pupils for working life and to equip them with the necessary knowledge for a transfer to upper-secondary schools. Lessons in general secondary school are designed to pay special attention to the interests, skills and abilities of the individual pupils. In the 3rd and 4th year of general secondary school much attention is being paid on preparing pupils for their further educational and vocational careers.

6. In order to do justice to the individual pupil's abilities and pace of work, general secondary school streams pupils in the subjects German, Mathematics and modern foreign language. Transfer between the individual streams is possible not only after each year but also during the school year. Within the framework of school autonomy schools are given the opportunity to introduce their own modified curricula. By doing so, schools may specify in certain areas such as modern foreign languages, sports, fine arts, science and technology, ecology, computer science etc. In addition to that, special types of general secondary school offer orientation towards sports or musical education.

#### *Pre-vocational School*

7. Some 20 per cent of the Austrian teenagers choose to complete compulsory education by attending the pre-vocational school [Polytechnische Schule]. This possibility is mainly used by those 14 to 15 year-olds who intend to enter apprenticeship training. The purpose of the pre-

vocational school is to qualify them for transition to apprenticeship training or continuing education; special attention is being paid to the individual pupil's interests, abilities and skills.

### *Academic Secondary Schools*

8. The purpose of an academic secondary school [allgemeinbildende höhere Schule] is to impart broad and extended general education, thereby providing pupils with standard entry qualifications for university and a solid basis for more specialized education or training – in post-secondary courses, at post-secondary colleges, universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) or on the job. But although the academic secondary school considers it one of its foremost tasks to impart knowledge, it also aims at providing students with numerous other qualifications and skills (e.g. working methods, the ability to co-operate, independence and responsibility). In order to provide for a broad and extended general education, there is a core curriculum which is taught in all school types up to the "Reifeprüfung"-Exam.

9. Education at an academic secondary school lasts for an overall period of eight years and is divided into a lower (years 5 to 8) and an upper (years 9 to 12) level. The upper-level form of academic secondary school [Oberstufenrealgymnasium] only comprises years 9 to 12 and may be attended after successful completion of the fourth year of a lower secondary school. The various forms and special types of academic secondary school constitute a range of options among which students may choose.

10. Admission to the first year of an academic secondary school is conditional upon successful completion of the fourth year of primary school and the pupil's performance in the subjects German, reading and Mathematics, which must have been assessed as "excellent" or "good". If the pupil's performance in the subjects mentioned above has been assessed as "satisfactory" he or she can be admitted upon recommendation by the teaching staff of the primary school. If a pupil fails to meet these requirements, he or she has to take an entrance exam.

11. Upon completion of the fourth year of a lower secondary school students may transfer to an upper-level form of academic secondary school without having to do an entrance exam. Based on the condition that they have either successfully completed set I in the subjects German, Mathematics and foreign language or that they have obtained the mark "good" or a better one in these subjects and "satisfactory" or a better one in all the other compulsory subjects or that they have completed the respective year with distinction in set II<sup>2</sup>.

12. The "Reifeprüfung"-Certificate is a school-leaving certificate which provides access to studies at institutes of higher education. The "Reifeprüfung"-Exam puts emphasis on reality-oriented studying, independent working, interdisciplinarity and on foreign languages. The subjects in which the students have to take an exam differ according to the school type. Each student, however, has to do a written exam in the core subjects of German, Mathematics and foreign language. Students who opt for a fourth written exam only have to do three oral exams, all others have to do four. In addition to that, special attention is being paid to the students' individual interests providing them with the opportunity to choose among various types of written and oral exams. Instead of doing a fourth written exam students may also choose to do a written project in the first semester of the eighth year. This written project will be discussed in the course of the oral "Reifeprüfung"-Exam and is supposed to prepare students for university-like working methods.

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<sup>2</sup> In most lower secondary schools, achievement grouping is common practice. There are mostly three groups: Set I (high achievement) ... set 3 (low achievement)

*Neue Mittelschule (New Secondary School)*  
*Neue Mittelschule (New Secondary School)*

13. Since 2008, in Austria, the large-scale school pilot project “Neue Mittelschule” (“New Secondary School”) is being effected. This school covers the years 5-8 and is conceived as a comprehensive and inclusive school for all pupils aged 10-14. For further description see 1.2.1

*Apprenticeship training (dual system)*

14. In Austria, apprenticeship training takes place at two different sites: company-based training of apprentices is complemented by compulsory attendance at a part-time vocational school for apprentices [Berufsschule]. Thus, apprenticeship training is also referred to as "dual vocational training system" or as "dual system". Apprenticeship training lasts two to four years, in most cases, however, three years. In case of accreditation of other educational pathways (e.g. vocational schools, vocational training abroad) the period of apprenticeship may be reduced. Moreover, the period of apprenticeship training may also be reduced for students holding certain qualifications. This especially benefits holders of the "Reifeprüfung"-Certificate for it increases their choice and makes it easier for them to find employment. Training for several occupations at the same time is possible provided certain requirements are met.

### **2.1.3 Upper secondary vocational schools and colleges**

*General Information on Secondary Vocational Schools and Colleges*

15. For the last two decades, secondary vocational schools and colleges have been experiencing a steady rise in student numbers. This is partly due to the well-balanced curriculum they offer, comprising general education and technical theory in the respective fields as well as practical training (compulsory work placements varying from school to school), and partly to the variety of educational possibilities and fields of specialisation. There are different organisational forms of secondary vocational schools and colleges which last from three to five years – vocational schools lasting either for three or four years and vocational colleges lasting for five years. They may either be organised as full-time schools to be attended after grade 8 of compulsory education (secondary vocational schools and colleges), as full-time schools to be attended after the "Reifeprüfung"-Exam (post-secondary courses) or as evening classes (for people in employment). The curricula of secondary vocational schools and colleges in Austria include compulsory work placement periods in the industry, the purpose of which is the practical application of knowledge and skills acquired in the various theory lessons and during training periods in workshops, labs, kitchens, etc. Work placements in schools and colleges for occupations in the business sector are optional.

16. Admission to secondary vocational schools and colleges presupposes successful completion of grade 8 of compulsory education. Depending on the school type, admission is also made conditional upon the assessment of the student's performance in certain subjects and on entrance exams. Some types of vocational schools and colleges also require an aptitude test. After having worked in their respective fields for a period of at least 6 years and upon having written a paper on a subject matter in the relevant field and subsequently having passed an exam held before a committee, graduates of colleges for engineering or colleges for agriculture and forestry may apply for the conferment of the title "Diplom-HTL-Ingenieur" or "Diplom-HLFL-Ingenieur".

### **2.1.4 Private Schools**

17. The Austrian Constitution lays down the right to establish private schools. Most private schools are run by the churches or special interest groups (chambers). There are two basic types of private schools: those that teach the official curriculum and those that have their own curriculum. The proportion of pupils enrolled in private schools is 5,4% (primary School) resp. 8,4% (lower secondary school) and 10,6% (upper secondary school).

## 2.2 THE OVERALL SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

18. In Austria, about 70% of pupils who attended a primary school go to a lower secondary school, about 30 % attend an academic secondary school, which varies regionally. Particularly Vienna has some districts where the number of pupils attending academic secondary schools is far higher. In remote rural areas, almost 100% of the student population attends lower secondary school.

19. The following table presents an overview of the schools, classes and pupils/students in the different types of schools available in the Austrian school system.

**Table 2: Schools, classes and students by type of school and federal province, school year 2009/10:**

Statistical Guide 2010

**Table 4:  
Schools, classes and students by type of school and federal province, school year 2009/10**

| Type of school <sup>1</sup>                                     | Austria, total |         |                 |                    | Burgenland |         |                 |                    |
|---|----------------|---------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|---------|-----------------|--------------------|
|   | Schools        | Classes | Students<br>all | of which<br>female | Schools    | Classes | Students<br>all | of which<br>female |
| All mainstream schools  | 5,786          | 55,410  | 1,143,533       | 546,863            | 284        | 1,804   | 35,380          | 17,162             |
| General schools, total  | 5,108          | 40,364  | 798,718         | 391,950            | 258        | 1,331   | 24,208          | 11,919             |
| Compulsory schools, total                                       | 4,769          | 31,106  | 579,314         | 274,436            | 247        | 994     | 17,043          | 8,151              |
| Primary schools   | 3,197          | 17,877  | 329,440         | 159,272            | 191        | 618     | 10,129          | 4,918              |
| Lower secondary schools   | 1,162          | 10,466  | 217,338         | 103,297            | 41         | 301     | 6,125           | 2,969              |
| Special (SEN) schools and classes                               | 324            | 1,823   | 13,221          | 4,719              | 12         | 49      | 308             | 109                |
| Pre-vocational schools  | 258            | 940     | 19,315          | 7,148              | 12         | 26      | 481             | 155                |
| New secondary schools   | 247            | 812     | 16,848          | 7,985              | 28         | 87      | 1,576           | 748                |
| Academic secondary schools, total                               | 338            | 8,446   | 202,556         | 109,529            | 11         | 250     | 5,589           | 3,020              |
| Academic secondary schools, full 8/9 year cycle                 | 271            | 7,225   | 174,264         | 92,552             | 8          | 191     | 4,301           | 2,272              |
| Academic secondary schools, lower level                         | 271            | 4,525   | 114,693         | 59,573             | 8          | 131     | 3,154           | 1,646              |
| Academic secondary schools, upper level                         | 264            | 2,700   | 59,571          | 32,979             | 7          | 60      | 1,147           | 626                |
| Academic secondary schools, separate upper level                | 103            | 1,047   | 24,217          | 14,717             | 7          | 59      | 1,288           | 748                |
| Academic secondary schools for people in employment             | 8              | 142     | 3,402           | 1,903              | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Add-on secondary schools  | 4              | 32      | 673             | 357                | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Technical and vocational schools, total                         | 642            | 14,462  | 329,502         | 143,874            | 25         | 458     | 10,772          | 4,859              |
| Vocational schools for apprentices, total                       | 160            | 6,661   | 140,256         | 48,828             | 4          | 122     | 2,650           | 693                |
| Vocational schools for apprentices                              | 151            | 6,610   | 139,373         | 48,370             | 4          | 122     | 2,650           | 693                |
| Vocational schools for agriculture and forestry for apprentices | 9              | 51      | 883             | 458                | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Technical and vocational schools and colleges, total            | 484            | 7,801   | 189,246         | 95,046             | 21         | 336     | 8,122           | 4,166              |
| Intermediate technical and vocational schools, total            | 427            | 2,235   | 51,712          | 25,061             | 21         | 84      | 1,830           | 1,009              |
| Crafts, technical and arts schools                              | 144            | 774     | 17,145          | 3,302              | 6          | 24      | 494             | 123                |
| Schools of business administration                              | 107            | 500     | 11,273          | 6,448              | 8          | 28      | 618             | 359                |
| Schools of management and the service industries                | 83             | 369     | 8,545           | 7,314              | 5          | 17      | 395             | 351                |
| Schools for social professions                                  | 15             | 60      | 1,563           | 1,442              | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Schools for agriculture and forestry                            | 96             | 532     | 13,186          | 6,555              | 3          | 15      | 323             | 176                |
| Higher technical and vocational colleges, total                 | 304            | 5,566   | 137,534         | 69,985             | 14         | 252     | 6,292           | 3,157              |
| Crafts, technical and arts colleges                             | 110            | 2,504   | 61,765          | 16,136             | 5          | 103     | 2,697           | 651                |
| Colleges of business administration                             | 109            | 1,803   | 43,362          | 26,356             | 7          | 98      | 2,290           | 1,289              |
| Colleges of management and the service industries               | 87             | 1,129   | 28,577          | 25,871             | 4          | 51      | 1,305           | 1,217              |
| Colleges of agriculture and forestry                            | 12             | 130     | 3,830           | 1,622              | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Institutions for teacher training, total                        | 38             | 584     | 15,313          | 11,039             | 1          | 15      | 400             | 384                |
| Intermediate schools for teacher training                       | 4              | 209     | 5,407           | 1,615              | -          | -       | -               | -                  |
| Higher colleges for teacher training                            | 34             | 375     | 9,906           | 9,424              | 1          | 15      | 400             | 384                |

<sup>1</sup> Schools for the medical services and schools with a statute of their own are not included.

Schools offering several types of schooling are counted only once in sum rows.

Source: Statistics Austria – Education documentation

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bm:uk Federal Ministry for  
Education, the Arts and Culture

20. The supreme authority of the Austrian school system is the Federal Minister for Education, the Arts and Culture (at present Frau Dr. Claudia Schmied). The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture commands about 800 employees (officials, contractual employees). It is subdivided into seven sections. Section 1 is responsible for the general school system and the teacher training colleges, section 2 is responsible for the vocational school system and for adult education. Each of the nine Austrian Federal States has a separate school administration, holding important competences especially concerning the compulsory school sector. Each of the nine Austrian provinces possesses a provincial educational board (a municipal educational board in Vienna) as a subordinate administrative office, holding important competences especially within the compulsory school sector.

### 2.2.1 Important Modifications /changes (projected or in recent times)

21. New Secondary School (Neue Mittelschule): One of the important innovations in the Austrian school system at present is the reform project New Secondary School („Neue Mittelschule“ NMS). The NMS is a school for the ages 10-14 (grades 5 to 8). It is a comprehensive school, integrating lower secondary school, lower level academic secondary school and special school into one type of school. Its basic objective is to avoid the early separation of pupils (after grade 4) into general secondary school and lower level academic secondary school. At the NMS, decisions about secondary school careers have to be taken after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

22. Being a comprehensive school does not render the subdivision of the lower secondary level into general secondary school and lower level academic secondary school obsolete. Especially the lower level academic secondary school continues to exist. Until now, the reform project is basically limited to former general secondary school locations and therefore competes with lower level secondary academic schools. The NMS principally applies the curricula of the secondary academic schools and the students get the chance to continue their education at a school providing the secondary school leaving certificate (Matura).

23. This attempt at a structural reform is accompanied by several forms of pedagogic reforms as for example new ways of individualising and differentiation of the classes, social learning and integration of handicapped pupils, gender mainstreaming, full-time school etc.. The NMS was implemented in 2008. At present (School year 2010/11), there are 320 schools (basically former lower secondary schools) that participate in this school pilot project.

24. At the beginning of the school pilot project, the NMS was politically controversial but this has changed in the meantime. Structural and pedagogic innovations, accompanied by better personal and material equipment, resulted in a successful improvement of image and attractiveness of the NMS among parents. An increasing number of former lower secondary schools tried to take part in this school pilot project. By and by, this led to a decreasing political resistance against the pilot project. Today, the coalition government agrees on the plan to convert all national lower secondary schools into NMS by the year of 2016.

25. The political consensus also changed the importance of the evaluation of the school pilot project. Initially, the BIFIE had been charged with the outcome oriented evaluation of the NMS, meaning the conduction of comparative analyses of NMS and traditional school forms regarding the learning successes of pupils. The political consensus, independent from existing evaluation outcomes, changed the destination of the evaluation: due to the great differences among the single NMS regarding the realisation of the educational innovations, the main destination route of evaluation now consists of the identification of successful and not successful realisations of the NMS, in order to further conduct the reform process.

26. New exit exams: Starting with the school year 2013/14 at the academic secondary schools (AHS, Gymnasien), and in the school year 2014/15 at the secondary vocational schools (BHS), the standardised, competence-oriented matriculation examination (skR) will be implemented. For further description see chapter 2.1.3.

27. Lifelong Learning constitutes an essential component regarding the competitive and employment capacity but also regarding the social integration, public spirit and the personal development of the individual. An increasingly broad participation in lifelong learning is taken as a crucial answer to the social and economical accomplishment of the structural change towards information society. Lifelong learning encompasses the formal, non-formal and informal areas of education, every form of learning and acquired competences. Austria has adopted a national strategy of lifelong learning<sup>3</sup>. Five essential guidelines have emerged in the course of the working process.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/20916/lllarpapier\\_ebook\\_gross.pdf](http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/20916/lllarpapier_ebook_gross.pdf)

- Phase of life orientation – The different vitas and educational processes of every stage of the professional and personal cycle have to be accounted for;
- Focussing on learners – New teaching and learning methods have to be developed and applied;
- Lifelong Guidance - Aiming at an improved coordination of offers and strategic development concerning information, counselling and orientation in education and profession;
- Competence orientation – Existing knowledge has to be visualised and transparent mechanisms of acknowledgement have to be provided;
- Supporting the participation in LLL – Abolishing of impediments and creation of incentive schemes

28. The current developments regarding educational standards as well as assessments and competence-orientation have to be regarded in the same context.

29. National Qualification Framework: The further development of a national LLL strategy is strongly connected to the development of a national qualification framework. The development design represents the formal, the non-formal and the informal areas. The reorientation towards an outcome and competence orientation is likely to induce a paradigm shift within the Austrian education system. A consensus about the benefit of outcome orientation in the education system itself as well as about the attribution of qualifications to the NQF is clearly discernible. In Austria, there are different starting positions in the implementation of outcome orientation. Some areas are advanced; some are only at the beginning.

30. Even though the attribution of the national qualification framework levels is effected on the basis of learning outcomes (meaning the matching of relevant learning outcomes and the descriptors of the respective levels), this does not mean that input-factors (e.g. duration of training, resources and contents) are to be neglected for the overall qualification system. The focus of the national qualification framework is on the identification of learning outcomes and the resulting (further) development of curricula and educational regulations as opposed to a complete new orientation of the Austrian educational system. This also applies for the attribution of professional authorisations regarded as a part of qualification.

## **2.3 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

### **2.3.1 Division of Responsibility for the School System**

#### *Legislation*

31. Legislation for the school system rests with the Austrian National Council (legislative body of the federal state). Therefore, the essential structural characteristics of the school system are rather homogeneous throughout Austria. Nevertheless, there are some specific implementation laws by the provincial parliaments concerning these federal laws. As a result, practical differences between the provinces are rather strong.

#### *Administration*

32. The Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) in Vienna is the supreme school and education authority. Furthermore, every province in Austria has its own school council as administrative authority, being a federal authority but also being responsible for important aspects of the school administration in the provinces. Among others, the school councils are responsible for the selection of teachers and the supervision of schools. The provinces have school departments at the provincial governments and consultants in the districts. Furthermore, every one of the 99 political districts has its own district school council, responsible for the regional administration and supervision

of the compulsory schools (Volks- und Hauptschulen). Finally there are the municipalities responsible for the maintenance of the local compulsory schools.

33. The division of competences between federal government, province, districts and municipalities regarding the administration of the school system are very complex and thus constitute a major issue in the discussion of educational policy. This discussion is rooted in the fact that Austria, compared to other countries, spends a lot of money on its educational system, whereas international comparative studies rate the achievements of Austrian pupils below average indicating a striking lack of efficiency in applied resources. Schmid, Ascher & Mayr (2009) hand down the following verdict: „Inefficiencies of the Austrian school administration and misdirected incentives due to a bureaucratic school-governance.“

34. Therefore, the streamlining and de-bureaucratization of the school administration is in the focus of a lot of reform proposals. Two specific modifications are presently at the centre of the discussion about educational politics:

- re-arrangement of school supervision: according to the current plans of the federal government, the system of district, province and professional school inspectors, located at the province school councils (s. 3.1.1.3) is subject to changes. These inspectors are to be substituted by specially trained quality management managers, working according to nationwide objectives. Their aim is to implement a modern quality management in the educational system.
- new service code for teachers: at present, federal school teachers („Bundesschulen“, ISCED Level 3 and higher) are directly employed by the federal state, compulsory school teachers (ISCED Level 1 and 2) are employed by the provinces, however, their wages are refunded by the federal state. In the future, teachers are supposed to be entirely employed either by the federal state or the provinces respectively.

### **2.3.2 School Autonomy**

35. Traditionally, the national and regional school administrations have a very strong influence on Austrian school practice. School autonomy regarding content of teaching, human resource development and budget is rather weak. Like in most other European countries (see EURYDICE 2007), there have been approaches at enlarging the self-reliance and the autonomy of schools in the 1990s. The 14. amendment of the School Organisation Act in 1993 as well as the respective amendment of the School Education Act, providing a distinct expansion of curriculum autonomy have been milestones. Also after 1993, there have been approaches at enlarging the self-reliance and autonomy of schools.

The present state is basically the following (Schratz & Hartmann (2009)):

- curriculum autonomy: within certain frameworks (= partial autonomy), schools are free to change the number of lessons for certain subjects, establish new compulsory topics, non-committal and free exercises and remedial teachings.
- class and group size: schools are free to change class and group sizes (opening new classes or dividing classes), avoiding extra costs.
- budget Autonomy: with the 14.amendment of the School Organisation Act, schools (Bundesschulen) are granted an ample scope of independent budgeting (from ca. € 360.-- to € 3.600.-- ). Schools are free to raise their budget by means of advertisements, sponsorships, letting of classrooms etc. The profits can be autonomously used for school purposes.

36. Schratz & Hartmann strike the following balance (2009): “Generally speaking, Austrian schools have gained more autonomous decision options concerning primary acts (organisation of curriculum



and classes), whereas the secondary acts (organisation of budgets, equipment and staff) are still controlled on higher levels (district, province, federal state). (...) There is still potential for development concerning the free choice of employment of funds (e. g. employment of the school budget), autonomy of staff (e.g. hiring and firing of teachers, fixing of starting salaries, decisions on promotions or advancements of teachers), as well as the participation of staff and school administration concerning education politics and administration.” (Schratz & Hartmann 2009, 329)

### **2.3.3 Important Modifications (Scheduled or in Recent Times)**

37. Within the framework of different reform approaches (New Secondary School [Neue Mittelschule], new service code for teachers, administrative reform) there is a clear emphasis on the expansion of school autonomy. The focus is mainly on raising the staff and budget competences of the headmasters/mistresses. It can be taken for granted that an expansion of school autonomy will become act of law in the next years.

### **3 The Framework for Evaluation and Assessment**

#### **3.1 CURRENT APPROACHES**

38. The present situation of evaluation and assessment is subject to fundamental changes of its overall conception. Being so far dominated by input orientated conceptions of system controlling, there are now output orientated or evidence-based concepts gaining importance. The following paragraph gives a short description of the traditional forms of quality management and development and a characterisation of the modifications that are now being implemented. As the Austrian school system is currently subject to severe changes, evaluation and quality management are rather fragmented, meaning that approaches of different conceptual background may stand isolated without connection.

##### **3.1.1 Traditions: Input Control**

39. Until recently, Austria has been dominated by a completely input orientated control system. The system was controlled by means of laws, regulations and assigning of resources, without systematically controlling if the aims and intentions connected are really achieved. The latent assumption behind this manner of controlling was the idea that political inputs automatically lead to practical improvements in teaching and learning and thus having positive effects on the output, meaning the pupils' results. The lack of systematic control of these assumed effects results in the systems liability to random political decisions.

40. According to the input orientated control system, there have been no approaches at controlling the pupils' results systematically and continuously. Even the final exams at the end of secondary level I and II (until 2013/13, cf. Chapter 2.1.3) bear no trace of national elements and comparability. There has been no systematic control as to the school system really achieving its aims.

41. On the school and teaching basis, the prevailing practice could be characterised as encouraging (but no obligation) for self-evaluation. The only systematic external evaluations have been the school projects that have been assessed regarding success or failure.

##### **3.1.2 Modifications: Current /Scheduled Conception**

42. The dubiousness of pure input orientated controlling has been noticed by a broader public as a result of the TIMSS and PISA surveys at the change of the century. The unquestioned assumption that the school system achieves what it is supposed to achieve has been thoroughly unsettled – although less thoroughly than in Germany. But the international comparative studies resulted in a change of attitude towards result orientation in the education system even in Austria.

43. These changing perceptions of quality control and development have been integrated into a programmatic volume about quality control and development by Ferdinand Eder et al. (2002), assigned by the former federal minister. This book features a proposal for an integrated, data-based system of quality control and development comprising all levels of the education system, from teacher/class, school and region to system controlling. As an important factor on the system level, it mentions a constant monitoring system as well as regular education reports as basis for controlling.

44. These proposals have been substantiated by a paper of a reform commission, also assigned by the federal ministry, the so called “future commission” (Haider et al. 2005<sup>4</sup>).

45. Despite the broad public response towards the commission's report, its proposals have not been politically or practically implemented in the following years. Only one aspect has undergone political substantiation in 2000: the development of uniform education standards for the school grades 4 and 8. However, the preparation of the implementation of this assignment alone took a considerable amount of time (see Specht 2006).

46. The changing attitude caused by PISA only gathered a central momentum in 2007 after a new minister took office. Since the beginning, she has focused on a more evidence based education policy. One of her first activities was to establish a “Federal Institute for Education Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System” (BIFIE) and its assignment with the consequent implementation and monitoring of educational standards, the elaboration of a concept for a standard, partially centralistic competence oriented school leaving examination (Matura) as well as the establishing of a permanent monitoring. It was also the Education Minister assigning the BIFIE with the creation of the first National Education Report, published in 2009.

### 3.1.3 Important Components of the Evaluation System

#### *System Evaluation*

47. At present, there exist (or are scheduled) a number of empiric, evidence-based approaches concerning system monitoring:

48. *Tests of educational standards:* in the past decade Austria has developed educational standards in the subjects German and Mathematics for the 4<sup>th</sup> and German, English and Mathematics for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>5</sup>. These standards define those competences pupils are supposed to have acquired until the end of the respective grade, i.e. competences, abilities and attitudes that are essential for the further vocational education.

49. *Central final exam at the end of upper secondary level:* There have been no central exams at the end of upper secondary level in Austria so far. Schools have been developing their tasks on their own, only having to be approved by the regional school administrations. With the beginning of school year 2013/14 and the introduction of a standardised, competence-oriented matriculation exam (skR), this fact is about to change: The written matriculation projects will be given nationwide. From school year 2014/15 on, this will also be the case at the BHS. Analogously to the educational standards, the nationwide tasks are supposed to grant more result orientation concerning the planning and performance of classes. At the same time, the results of the skR promise to be a valuable element for the system evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup> Download at [http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/10473/Konzept\\_Zukunft.pdf](http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/10473/Konzept_Zukunft.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The assessment of educational standards concerns all pupils in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the named subjects. However, pupils with physical or perceptual handicap or with special needs are excluded. The same holds true for extraordinary pupils, for example pupils that had not been able to follow lessons in the previous term, due to insufficient knowledge of the German language.

In a study in 2002, Bauer & Specht stated that for the above mentioned groups of pupils, process standards were a lot more helpful than outcome standards (published in Specht W., Gross-Pirchegger L., Seel A., Stanzel-Tischler E., Wohllhart D.: Qualität in der Sonderpädagogik: Ein Forschungs- und Entwicklungsprojekt. ZSE Report Nr. 70. Zentrum für Schulentwicklung, Abt. Evaluation und Schulforschung, Graz 2006.)

### *Participation in International Studies*

50. At present, Austria is participating in the following international comparative studies:

- OECD/PISA: rating of the reading, mathematical and natural science competence of 15/16 year old pupils at the end of their compulsory school days.
- OECD/TALIS (participation only in 2009): survey of central framework conditions for teaching and learning of the teaching personnel and headmasters on secondary level I
- IEA/PIRLS: rating of the reading competence of 9/10 year old pupils at the end of primary school.
- IEA/TIMSS: rating of the Mathematics and natural science competence of 9/10 year old pupils at the end of primary school.

51. Apart from the participation in international comparative studies on student achievements, Austria takes part in international studies on specific aspects of the educational system. Examples are the OECD “Review of Migrant Education”, the OECD activity “Improving School Leadership”, or the OECD programme “Schooling for tomorrow” (Finished: 2009). Learning for Jobs (2010)

52. The international comparison supplements and enlarges the national results and puts them into a larger scale. The international comparison of all OECD-and EU- countries helps to highlight important strengths and weaknesses of the school systems.

### *Regular National Education Reports*

53. The first national education report for Austria was published in June 2009. It comprises two volumes: the first one tries to illustrate the Austrian education system based on certain data and indicators whereas the second one focuses on “analyses of key issues of education politics“. The education report supports the political objective of an evidence-based education policy: meaning that political decisions

(a) are supposed to be oriented towards objective perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the respective education systems, and that

(b) science and research are supposed to contribute to the control system in order to create and expand knowledge bases.

The two main functions of the report are

- expanding the system knowledge and perception based on data and facts in order to support modern education policy (evidence-based policy) in its decisions and controlling;
- to account for the present state and the problems of the school system towards the public and the legislature in order to support educational reform schemes.

The national education report is to be published in a three year cycle.

54. A different type of education report is published once a year, edited by “Statistik Austria” (statistics Austria) . “Statistik Austria” is a federal office of the public-sector. Its task is the service delivery of federal statistics with scientific character.<sup>6</sup> Statistik Austria publishes a two-volume

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<sup>6</sup> [www.statistik.at](http://www.statistik.at)

statistical report on education in Austria once a year. The first volume contains key indicators and analyses<sup>7</sup>, the second volume purely consists of charts.<sup>8</sup>

### *School Evaluation*

55. As opposed to evaluation on the system level, the school evaluation knows very little mandatory forms of evaluation. Evaluation of schools is carried out by the members of the school administration/the inspectorate according to an administrative order of the Ministry for Education in the year 1999 (task profile of the school administration, 1999). The starting point of the school evaluation is the school programme, supposed to contain „at least an inventory, general principles, an action scheme and evaluation schemes.“ (l.c. S.6) The school administration controls if the quality schemes of the schools are „state of the art“. An examination in detail is to be effected, „if the methodical contextual analysis of the self-evaluation by the school administration assesses shortcomings or essential requirement standards are not achieved. Such an examination is preceded by counselling and supporting activities. Respective requirements in order to eliminate these shortcomings by the school itself are to be imposed on demand.“ (l.c. p.7)

56. Until now, neither school programmes nor systematic quality evaluations are mandatory for schools. Since the 1990s, there are advices and supporting systems for the execution of *self-evaluation at schools*. The website [www.qis.at](http://www.qis.at) of the ministry for education for example encourages and supports schools at planning and executing self-evaluating activities. The same is true for the Website [www.qibb.at](http://www.qibb.at), concerning the vocational school system. Until now, these activities are voluntary services of the schools (see 4.2).

57. In recent times, there are developments towards a more evidence-based school development of single schools. These developments are a result of the above mentioned elaboration and testing of educational standards as well as the centralisation of examinations at the end of upper secondary level.

58. The survey of the educational standards, supposed to be held once a year from school year 2011/12 on, is combined with the feedback of the results towards the schools. This procedure is mandatory, following the ministry's act on educational standards:

*„Standards tests are ... to be effected and their results are to be fed back to schools. The evaluations of the standards test and the feedback have to be effected in a manner that qualifies them for the objective of quality development at schools“<sup>9</sup>*

59. This means that every school gets a feedback about the collected competences of its pupils, in order to establish school development schemes accordingly. Furthermore, every teacher gets the aggregated results of his or her class. These results of schools and classes and the deduced performance profile of the respective subjects serve as starting point for the focussed further development of instruction and quality at schools. This effect is supported by the assignment of specially trained „feedback moderators“, facilitating the interpretation and deeper understanding of the results.

60. A comprehensive evaluation of the feedback process and the implementation of results are supposed to give an impression whether or not the external evaluation of school by means of standard tests has a positive effect on quality development. The evaluation comprises among others a differentiated questioning of all concerned headmasters/mistresses and teachers about their perception and assessment of the feedback process, its results and the consequences at schools.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/dynamic/statistiken/bildung\\_und\\_kultur/publdetail?id=5&listid=5&detail=461](http://www.statistik.at/web_de/dynamic/statistiken/bildung_und_kultur/publdetail?id=5&listid=5&detail=461)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/dynamic/statistiken/bildung\\_und\\_kultur/publdetail?id=5&listid=5&detail=462](http://www.statistik.at/web_de/dynamic/statistiken/bildung_und_kultur/publdetail?id=5&listid=5&detail=462)

<sup>9</sup> Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur über Bildungsstandards im Schulwesen, § 3 (4)

### *Teacher Appraisal*

61. The current attempts at a more compelling evaluation of the school system mostly concern approaches at system monitoring and school evaluation. These are related in so far as the assessments of educational standards constitute the key starting point for both. The assessments of educational standards are a crucial element of system monitoring. The feedback of outcomes to the schools constitutes important starting points for a data based evaluation of schools.

62. The approaches to an evaluation of teacher performance (Teacher Appraisal) stand in distinct contrast to this self-related system of school and system evaluation. The teaching staff may get feedback on their students' achievements at the testings of educational standards and thus the chance for self-evaluation. But these testings only concern one domain every school year (German or mathematics or English) and are only applied to one cohort (4<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade). This means that only teachers of (a) standards domains and (b) in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade will get feedback. Therefore only a small part of all teachers are concerned of standards testings in a given school year and the significance of educational standards as instruments of self-evaluation of teaching staff is clearly reduced.

63. There are three different forms of teacher appraisal in the Austrian school system (s. in detail 6.1):

- (a) evaluation and assessment of teachers by the school management: the headmaster/headmistress as direct superior holds among others the task of assessing the quality of the teachers achievements. Therefore the headmaster/the headmistress visits and attends the classes of a single teacher for one or more lessons.
- (b) in case of serious or frequent complaints of parents about a teacher, the supervision of schools (Inspektorat) initiates a special assessment of this particular teacher: an inspector visits the classes, eventually talks to students and school management and verifies the validity of the parents' complaints.
- (c) a third form of evaluation is enacted by the teacher him- or herself, meeting the obligation to evaluate his or her classes on his or her own. Methods of self-evaluation are not mandatory. Methodical approaches of self-evaluation of classes by means of students' perceptions are provided by several websites ([www.qis.at](http://www.qis.at); [www.qibb.at](http://www.qibb.at)).

Outside evaluations of teachers by the school management or inspections are rather rare occurrences within the Austrian school system and tend to have no consequences, as shown by the OECD-Survey TALIS (2008). Only severe cases of neglect of duty may lead to a transfer to another school or to a dismissal from the teaching service. A mandatory participation in training programmes might be a more frequent consequence.

By and large, "Teacher Appraisal" holds a more or less secondary status within the general concept of evaluation of the school system. Although there are several public voices that ask for a more severe quality control of school education and a more performance-related payment of teachers. Up to now, teachers' unions have been able to prevent these approaches. It seems rather unlikely that the new teacher service law, currently negotiated between the Ministry of Education and the teachers' representatives, will lead to stronger elements in this direction.

### *Student Assessment*

64. The survey and assessment of student performance is also only partly correlated to the new data based evaluation and management model depicted above.

65. This fact relates especially to the new partly centralised and competence-oriented school leaving examination (skR), implemented in Austria as from school year 2013/14 (s. 3.1.2.1). While there has formerly been no central final exam in Austria, a partly centralised and standardised procedure will be implemented at the end of the upper secondary level, providing the students with a certificate for university admission. Standardisation concerns the tasks as well as the assessment of student performance (s. 6.1.2.2). The skR aims at rendering the performances of pupils and students more

comparable. It guarantees transparency, the highest possible objectivity and raises the significance of final examinations. A special concern pursued by this amendment of the school education act is the sustainable safeguarding of acquired competences. At the same time, the national results of the skR constitute an important feature of system monitoring, giving an overview of the students' success or failure related to the central requirements of the school system.

66. In contrast, the educational standards – the second central element of the evaluation system – is only loosely connected to the system of student assessment: every student gets a feedback on his or her performance at the standards' testings, giving him or her a tool for self-evaluation. The performance, however, bears no influence on the formal student assessment (grades, graduation). As far as the students are concerned, these standard testings are definitely „low stakes tests“.

67. The formal assessment of the student performance in tests, reports and final exams (with exception of the skR) rests exclusively with the teaching staff, making use of certain assessment criteria and grades depicted in detail in paragraph 6.1.1.1.

### *Summary*

68. In total, it can be stated that in the course of a transition from a merely input-oriented towards a stronger output-oriented control system, a number of evidence based components of an evaluation system have been created, concerning basically the system level. These are the educational standards and their testing as well as new standardised and competence oriented maturation exam and the national education report.

69. So far, the remaining evaluation levels (school evaluation, teacher appraisal, student assessment) are not data-related and evidence-based to the same extent. However, the new instruments on the systems level bear an influence on the evaluation practices at schools, among teachers and students. Thus it can be stated that the controlling philosophy has changed the evaluation system, although the “old” approaches and methods continue to exist.

## **3.1.4 Objectives and Functions**

70. The objectives of the educational system and its supporting evaluation system in Austria are only very generally codified. In particular, the Austrian education act establishes no direct connection between the objectives of the educational system and the contribution the evaluation system is supposed to give.

71. An exception was the act on introduction of educational standards, passed in 2009. It established a direct connection between their implementation and examination and the objective targets at schools. Accordingly, educational standards are supposed to

- a. “guarantee a sustainable results-orientation in planning and execution of classes,
- b. guarantee the best possible diagnostics as a basis for individual support by establishing distinct comparative scales, and
- c. contribute significantly to quality development at schools“<sup>10</sup>

72. Otherwise, there are only functions (not objectives) of the evaluation system to be mentioned:

- Its main function on the *system level* is to equip decision makers in educational politics with data and information for a fact oriented system control. Participation in international

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<sup>10</sup> Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur über Bildungsstandards im Schulwesen, §3(1)

achievement surveys (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS), execution of standardised national assessments and the publishing of national education reports with data and analyses concerning the education system all serve this objective.

- On *school level* it aims at the gradual improvement of educational practice by means of instructed self-evaluation and school development processes. In the future, schools will get comparative data of the National Assessments in order to evaluate their own quality more reliably and to be able to conceive school development processes more purposefully. Furthermore, school evaluation and Teacher Appraisal are carried out by external assessments of the school administration.

### **3.1.5 Strategic Importance of the Evaluation System for Educational Policy**

73. The significance of evaluation as a means of evidence-based policy and practice for the educational system is definitively on the rise. Objective information, data, are supposed to grant politicians (system control) as well as schools and teachers the possibility to enforce political decisions and school development schemes along clearly identified strengths and weaknesses. Since the end of the 1990s, scientifically achieved data and insights about the educational system are increasingly accepted as legitimation for reforms or growing input of resources.

### **3.1.6 Institutions and Authorities: Division of Responsibility**

#### *System Level*

74. On the level of the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, the sections 1 (general education) and 2 (vocational education) are responsible for the evaluation and assessment of the different school types. Apart from mere school management, both sections include departments that are responsible for comprehensive quality development and control. Additionally, an overall „co-ordination office for the BIFIE and education research for the department“ (president: Federal Minister Dr. Schmied) has been established, responsible for the control of the BIFIE (see below) in particular.

75. In the fields of evaluation and quality management, the Federal Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (*Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens BIFIE*) assumes a central role. It was created in 2008, specifically to assume the agendas of quality management and evaluation (see. BIFIE law 2008). The institute's head office is based in Salzburg. At present, the BIFIE has three so called centres:

- At the head office in Salzburg you find the centre for national and international assessments, carrying out all the major international surveys like PISA, PIRLS etc., as well as national school investigations concerning educational standards.
- The centre in Vienna is primarily occupied with the elaboration of schemes for quality development in the school system. The present focus is on the implementation of educational standards for the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the arrangement of the standardised competence-oriented matriculation examination.
- A third centre at Graz is basically involved in scientific projects of educational research and evaluation. It plans and executes most evaluation projects on innovation in the education system.

76. The BIFIE takes over the central functions of evaluation and quality management on the system level (education monitoring, examination of standards, international assessments, educational reports).



The Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) commissions the BIFIE with these tasks; the latter carries them out on its own responsibility.

77. Apart from the BIFIE, there are two institutions that execute evaluative functions on the system level in a broader sense.

- On the one hand “Statistik Austria”, assuming an active role in the field of system monitoring and having cooperated with the BIFIE in compiling the first National Education Report (development of indicators, quality control of the indicators).
- The second institution is the Court of Auditors. The Court of Auditors controls “in the framework of its constitutionally guaranteed independence if the funds provided by the budget are employed in an economical, efficient and appropriate way.”<sup>11</sup> In this context, the Court of Auditors also controls the action and efficiency of educational institutions. For example, the Court published a report of the “efficiency and quality of the vocational school system”<sup>12</sup> in 2009.

#### *School and Individual Level*

78. The facilities and institutions mentioned in the paragraph above are mainly responsible for the evaluation on the system level (System Monitoring). There are different authorities in charge of the evaluation of schools, the monitoring of teacher performance (Teacher Appraisal) and for the student assessment:

- The *Evaluation of schools* lies partly in the responsibility of the headmasters and headmistresses (self-evaluation); Inspectors, institutionally located at the provincial and district school authorities, serve as external evaluators. The regulations concerning the inspection of schools are illustrated in chapter 3.1.3. where also differentiated information on the structure and the functions of the inspectorate are to be found.
- The *Evaluation of teacher performance (Teacher Appraisal)* is primarily the task of the headmasters and headmistresses as direct supervisors of teachers. The headmasters/ headmistresses make sure of the quality of classes by classroom observations and have the authority to compel teachers to participate in further training programmes. In special cases (e.g. massive complaints by parents), regional inspectors assume the task of teacher evaluation by visiting the schools in order to talk to the teachers that are concerned and by observing their classes. The responsibilities for the evaluation of teachers are described in paragraph 5.1.1.1.
- The *assessment of the student performance (Pupil Assessment)* is executed by the subject teachers according to fixed rating scale that are similar in all different grades (s. the detailed description in paragraph 6.1.1.1). Until now, there are no nationwide or objective forms of student assessment. This will change in the school year 2014. The regulations of the standardised, competence-oriented maturation exam (skR), containing standardised elements for tasks and assessment of the matura are to be effected in that school year.

### **3.1.7 Consistency and Cooperation of the Different Authorities**

79. Substantial parts of the framework (especially the tasks of the BIFIE) are very new and have to be evaluated regarding their qualification. Unintended side-effects will have to be considered.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/home.html>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/fileadmin/downloads/2009/berichte/teilberichte/bund/bund\\_2009\\_06/bund\\_2009\\_06\\_1.pdf](http://www.rechnungshof.gv.at/fileadmin/downloads/2009/berichte/teilberichte/bund/bund_2009_06/bund_2009_06_1.pdf)

### **3.1.8 The Development and Creation of Expertise about Evaluation within the System**

80. The development of expertise and know-how about evaluation and assessment is to be guaranteed by the liberalisation of all data generated by the BIFIE in the course of international and national assessments. Thus the data will have to stand the test of secondary analyses by the scientific community.

A second package of measures cares for the editing of the manifold survey reports for the different recipients (science, politics and practice). Furthermore, it is important to reflect the results of single schools and teachers by means of feedback moderators. This also increases the schools knowledge about evaluation and its methods.

### **3.1.9 Importance of Information Technology for the Efficiency of Evaluation**

81. Information technology has positive effects on the following aspects:

- the possibility of online-assessments – especially within the field of evaluation of the assessment framework. Currently, a paper & pencil procedure is applied.
- analysis and feedback of school and teacher specific results within a narrow time frame.

### **3.1.10 Improvement of Schools and Instruction by Evaluation?**

82. The analysis of educational standards is not only used on the system level. All the single schools, classes and individuals receive a feedback of their results, using general and “fair” comparisons (e.g. comparison of schools with a similar socio-cultural background). In this context, it is important to not only confront the schools with charts and statistics but to send trained facilitators as well, explaining and interpreting the results of schools and individual teachers, giving hints how to apply certain development schemes in order to improve their results.

83. If these activities really help to improve the quality of schools and instruction remains uncertain for now and will have to be determined in the course of evaluation schemes of the evaluation framework. It is important that all approaches at result feedback at schools are evaluated themselves. In the course of this evaluation, headmasters/mistresses and teachers are asked to comment on the usefulness of these data regarding quality development. The results so far are rather promising. You can find those at [http://www.bifie.at/sites/default/files/publikationen/2008-04-01\\_BIFIE-Report-Bildungsstandards.pdf](http://www.bifie.at/sites/default/files/publikationen/2008-04-01_BIFIE-Report-Bildungsstandards.pdf).

## **3.2 CONTEXT**

### **3.2.1 Important Recent Developments**

84. The most important recent developments leading to the present provisional implementation of the evaluation framework could be sketched out as follows:

- at the turn of the millennium, international performance analyses like TIMSS, PISA et al. led to a higher acknowledgement of the importance of data and facts of the school system's output. The former input orientation of the control system was put into question.
- in the past decade, several expert opinions of well renowned research groups (Eder et al. 2002, Haider et al. 2005) have hinted at the necessity of an ongoing system monitoring and a strongly evidence-based education policy. These hints remained neglected until the new administration took office in 2007.

- since the beginning, the new minister has emphasised that one of her greatest concerns was a strongly evidence-based education policy. One of her first acts was the establishment of the Federal Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens, BIFIE) and its assignment with the consequent implementation and analysis of educational standards, the elaboration of a concept for a centralised, competence-oriented maturation examination (Matura) and the establishment of an ongoing system monitoring. The new minister for education also assigned the BIFIE with the elaboration of the first national education report.
- several pilot projects about data-based school development (Grabensberger, Freudenthaler & Specht, 2008; Specht & Grabensberger, 2007) have been partially able to dissipate prevailing doubts about school-oriented data.
- the steadily growing international contacts as well as the interlacing of educational systems have paved the way for information about evaluative practice in other countries and have thus increased the acceptance of system monitoring and empirical evaluation schemes.

### 3.2.2 Coherence of Evaluation and School Autonomy, Educational Standards etc.

85. The growing significance of evaluation and assessments is related to the notice of intention of expanding school autonomy, last regulated in 1993. The prevailing argumentation grants schools a larger creative scope but also holds them accountable for their results (Evaluation). The approaches at a student assessment, scheduled for 2011/12, are directly connected to the development of national educational standards for the grades 4 and 8. These standards are subject to examination on a national level.

86. Also the concept of the standardised, competence-oriented maturation examination is related to granting the schools room for development. Even here, the schools have a larger creative scope for developing the *processes* (education and instruction), but their *results* have to meet common standards, valid for the whole school system.

### 3.2.3 Political Powers and Legal Regulations

87. The implementation of assessment- and evaluation strategies in Austria is basically a top-down matter, put forward by the responsible ministries<sup>13</sup>. Other key-players like parents' or teachers' organisations have shown reservations about these developments.

### 3.2.4 Connection to Developments on Other Levels

88. Apart from the existence of a general tendency even on the public sector towards demanding "value for money" and accounting for it, there are no discernable connections to tendencies on the public sector. Furthermore, the public sector in Austria in general appears to be rather reluctant towards changes – the last 10 years have shown no noticeable reforms in this sector.

89. The standardised, competence-oriented maturation examination (skR) has to be regarded at the background of the university development in Austria. Universities, struggling with increasing student enrolment rates, push the introduction of admission tests (already established for some subjects), lowering the value of the matura. The skR is supposed to guarantee the applicants' quality, making admission tests futile and manifesting the present value of the matura.

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<sup>13</sup> „Education“ had been comprised in one ministry until 2007 and is now divided into scholar education (BMUKK – Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur) and university education (BMWf – Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung).

### **3.3 INITIATIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION**

90. For the time being, initiatives are residing with the ministry and the enforcing federal institute BIFIE. The latter is presently charged with the elaboration of a differentiated framework for quality development, rather at the beginning of its creation. Most of the other stakeholder groups assume a rather observant attitude.

91. In the last years, the BIFIE has been busy developing educational standards and corresponding tests for German, Mathematics and English for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and in German and Mathematics for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The first comprehensive tests of these standards will be held in 2012-2014. Additionally, the BIFIE is currently preparing the introduction of the skR. The ministry is responsible for the allocation of funds and human resources for these activities and accompanies them by legal actions. A high number of teachers is involved in working teams (e.g. development of sample tasks for educational standards). The other stakeholders are involved by means of a systematic information policy.

#### **3.3.1 Groups of Stakeholders and their Cooperation**

92. Until now, the academic pedagogic science, the BIFIE and the federal ministry of education have been the key figures involved and pushing forward the development of a framework for evaluation:

- (a) several groups of scientists, assigned by the ministry, are elaborating a comprehensive framework for a system of quality control and development, involving all levels (politics, district, school, class, teacher, pupil),
- (b) the BIFIE is presently busy, implementing this theoretical framework into practice,
- (c) the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture is responsible for the above mentioned measures. It funds the BIFIE, sets legal and organisational activities and accompanies the actual implementation as a „critical friend“.

93. The other stakeholders are involved by means of a systematic information policy. Nevertheless, the most common point of criticism by parents' and teachers' associations is - despite their expertise - their insufficient involvement into consultations and resolutions of actual activities like educational standards or the skR.

#### **3.3.2 Obstructions and Difficulties in Implementation**

94. The main obstacle in the past has been the deep rooted conviction of many stake holders considering systematic evaluation on the educational level as impossible and pointless. This conviction has many supporters among scientists, rejecting evaluation in practice. For a long time, politicians have not been able to confront this deep rooted opposition against evaluation and assessment systems with adequate measures. In recent times, a distinct political approach is becoming discernible. At present, we see a broad acceptance concerning the steps taken, but also a tendency of awaiting.

#### **3.3.3 Political Priorities**

95. The overall priority remains the establishment of evidence-based basis for decision-making on the political as well as the practical level. Three measure packages assume political priority:

- (a) implementation and systematic testing of educational standards until 2014,

(b) implementation of the standardised, competence-oriented maturation examination, i.e. a mandatory final exam for all graduates, guaranteeing fairness and comparability,

(c) the continuous publishing of a national education report, documenting successively all relevant data and insights about the educational system, generated by independent researchers without exertion of influence by the ministry.

### **3.4 EXCURSUS: CENTRAL NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS WITHOUT FORMAL EFFECTS ON THE STUDENTS - FUNCTIONS**

96. Educational standards<sup>14</sup> are constructed on the basis of a competence model which builds a bridge between abstract goal formulations and specific subjects. Competences are defined as lasting cognitive skills that can be developed by learners and enable them to perform specific tasks in variable situations, involving the willingness (dynamics and social competence) to use these skills. These competences are described in such concrete terms that it is possible to transform them into specific tasks and test them (cf. BMUKK, Development of Education in Austria, 2004 – 2007; BMUKK, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). The tasks of varying complexity involve a broad distribution of cognitive levels. In an ideal case items aim at the cross-linked/integrated use of competences in an appropriate process and context.

97. The general goal of educational standards is to establish common aims and criteria for learning. For schools this means, that they receive feedback on their pupils learning, under consideration of their framework conditions. The Ministry for Education specifies the benefit for the main users (cf. BMUKK, Austrian Education News, 2004). Educational standards serve as feedback for teachers on their assessment criteria, ascertainment of common aims, and as an impetus for targeted remedial teaching in order to guarantee the set levels of attainment and as an impulse for improved diagnostics. However, teachers are guaranteed free scope for action in terms of school development and teaching, and especially in terms of designing in-school learning plans. Another aim concerning teachers is that they will learn from experience and feedback. As far as students are concerned, educational standards help them to increase their self-assessment skills and provide a better basis for remedial measures. The students' motivation for self-directed learning is also expected to improve. However, the results of standards tests do not affect students' grades and the results of standards tests are not used to assess teachers or schools or use them in rankings. To sum up, the emphasis lies on the internal use rather than on the external use of educational standards. (cf. BMUKK, Austrian Education News, 2004)

98. Standards describe the expected learning outcome, focusing on the core areas of a subject. They also define the basic subject and interdisciplinary competences which are crucial for further education. As schools become increasingly autonomous, more and more emphasis is laid on standards to ensure comparability.

99. There is a distinction between educational standards functioning as orientation and a means to foster learning through precise goals, and standards testing with a clearly evaluative function, measuring the level of skills and competences at a certain point of time.

100. According to § 3 Bildungsstandards-VO (BGBl. II Nr. 1/2009), the functions of the educational standards are: 1. long-term outcome-orientation in the planning and practice of teaching, 2. the best possible diagnostics for every individual pupil on the basis of precise standards of comparison and 3. a contribution to the quality development of Austrian schools (BMUKK, Beschlussreifer Entwurf, 2008).

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding the latest version of the assessment and the feedback of Austrian educational standards cf. download under <https://www.bifie.at/node/560>

101. In 2008, the Ministry of Education enacted the educational standards in the School Education Law § 17 Abs. 1 BGBl. I Nr 117/2008. In the following paragraph, the explanations to this law will be summed up (cf. BMUKK, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). The first idea, outcome-orientation, explains that educational standards lay down what pupils should know by a certain point of time. Teachers have to support every individual in order to reach their best possible achievement. Knowing the students' level of achievement in respect to the educational standards is a prerequisite for using adequate support and remedial measures. For this purpose, teachers are provided with special tools such as sample tasks and diagnostic instruments. The second aim, focused support for students, means that teachers compare the educational standards with their students' real learning results and analyse them in order to diagnose a student's level of proficiency. If a student has any difficulties in reaching the goals, the teacher has to foster and support him/her in the best possible way to achieve the goals.

102. As far as quality development for schools is concerned, standard tests supply the school system with feedback on student skills. They support internal (within the school) and external (by the supervisory school authority) steering measures. Schools are provided with the aggregated test results and should use them to improve their quality. Measures of quality improvement may comprise: pedagogical conferences or subject teacher conferences, the elaboration of methodological-didactical concepts or professional training for teachers, exchange of ideas in networks and other activities (cf. BMUKK, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008).

103. Teachers are not assessed by their authorities but the regular work with the results of standard tests is supposed to establish a culture of common quality assurance at a school. Currently, the feedback strategy of test outcomes is planned as follows: students receive their individual test results, while teachers get the anonymous results of their classes. The results of the classes are also available to school management and school administration, which means that the school heads get the results of their school as well as of their individual classes.

### **3.4.1 Regional Variants**

104. The educational standards for the fourth and eighth grade are determined by federal laws and regulations. Accordingly, they are enacted nationwide all over Austria.

105. The nationwide examination of educational standards scheduled for the school year 2011/2012 is one of the crucial elements of the education monitoring. In terms of a system monitoring, the educational standards tests demonstrate to what extent the pupils' achievements comply with the given expectations (standards) and if there are regional discrepancies.

### **3.4.2 Development of Expertise within the System**

106. Primarily, the introduction of the educational standards and the skR lead to a nationwide composition of expertise, resulting in substantial modifications at the university colleges of teacher education (teacher training for compulsory schools, further training for teachers), at the universities (teacher training for the AHS and the BHS) but also concerning the tasks of the school administration.

107. The university colleges of teacher education assume an important role within the training of persons, responsible for the implementation of the educational standards (e.g. test leaders at schools, feedback moderators for the mediation of the results at the school location, school developers, supporting schools in development projects based on feedback results, etc.). Besides, they are supposed to enact modifications in the training of the future teachers of compulsory schools, preparing them for their roles as counsellors or facilitators of competences as opposed to mere contents. The same holds true for the teacher training at universities. Additionally, at the universities of Klagenfurt and Vienna, six teaching methodology centres (Austrian Educational Competence Centres, AECCs)<sup>15</sup> have been

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/schulen/schubf/se/aecc.xml>

implemented, playing an important role in the development of educational standards and supposed to cooperate closely with the university colleges of teacher education on this matter.

108. Finally, the role of the school administration in the provinces will have to be redefined in connection with the implementation of educational standards. Currently, it begins to show that the school administration will assume an important role facilitating school development processes, originating in the feedback of standards testing.

### **3.4.3 Implementation**

109. The Austrian curriculum at ISCED level II is divided into the core-curriculum, which accounts for two thirds of the teaching time, and the extended areas, the remaining third which is at the individual teacher's disposal and is usually used to meet the students' and teachers' special interests or the school profile. Educational standards lay down the core competences in specific subjects and standards tests aim at examining basic skills in a particular subject.

110. The implementation of educational standards is currently initiated on all levels of the educational system. In 2009, the first baseline-testing for year 8 in German, English and Mathematics was carried out by the BIFIE Salzburg, in 2010 for year 4 in German and Mathematics. This process involved 10 to 15 % of the schools.

111. The first compulsory regular and country-wide standards tests will start in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and all schools, even grant-aided schools, will be involved. Every year they will be tested in one subject (i.e. 2012: Mathematics 8<sup>th</sup> grade; 2013: Mathematics 4<sup>th</sup> grade and English 8<sup>th</sup> grade; 2014: German 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ...) and receive yearly feedback, as educational standards tests are compulsory. All participating schools in Austria are tested on the same day. Pupils with special education needs do not participate in national tests in Austria. However, process-standards were developed for SEN-pupils but they are not tested together with the national tests.

112. The BIFIE Vienna is involved in the phases of implementation, support and training between 2008 and 2011. At the same time, instruments for self-evaluation for all involved subjects at primary schools as well as general and academic secondary schools will be applied. These instruments will be created in cooperation with the BIFIE Vienna for the respective levels (years 4 and 8) before the external assessment. Between 2008 and 2013, further adjustments concerning school books, curriculum, output-orientation etc. have to be made (cf. BMUKK, press information, 2008).

### **3.4.4 Evidence for Effects of Student Assessments**

113. Educational standards are still work-in-progress in the Austrian education system and therefore only two reports dealing with their implementation and their impact can be summed up in this place.

114. In 2006, Freudenthaler and Specht (Centre of School Development) conducted a survey on the implementation process of educational standards after the first year in piloting phase II (Bildungsstandards: Der Implementationsprozess aus der Sicht der Praxis: Ergebnisse einer Fragebogen-Studie nach dem ersten Jahr der Pilotphase II).

115. A questionnaire for teachers at the piloting schools was designed which covered the following aspects in respect to educational standards: (a) clarity: are teachers aware of the ways educational standards can help to guide and design teaching?, (b) guideline and aid to orientation: in how far are standards diagnostic and action-guiding means of support for teachers in order to focus on the students' acquisition of lasting competences in their teaching?(c) impact on teaching: does working with standards influence the quality of teaching or the students' motivation?, (d) use of standards for lesson planning: to what extent do teachers incorporate standards in their teaching and lesson planning – apart from using the sample items they were explicitly asked to test?

116. The survey also focused on the quality of information and communication. Teachers were asked (a) how well-informed they felt concerning the aims of educational standards, (b) if they knew what was expected from them, (c) if they knew who to ask in order to get further information, (d) how well the communication between the project coordinators and the practitioners worked and (e) if they felt that their opinions and concerns were appreciated and taken seriously. Apart from that, the impact of educational standards on cooperation between teachers and the need of improvement as to materials and accompanying research was a matter of interest. The teachers' overall-attitude towards educational standards was measured on the basis of their experiences and their perceived effort/cost-benefit relation.

117. The sample involved 859 teachers (82 primary teachers, 486 general secondary school teachers and 292 academic secondary school teachers. 17 respondents did not state at what school type they taught).

118. During the piloting phase the testing of sample items of the educational standards and giving feedback on that process was emphasised. However, only 2 % to 11 % of the teachers used standards in addition to that process on a regular basis in their teaching and about 50 % of the teachers used standards "now and then" in their lesson planning. The remaining teachers restricted their use of standards during the pilot phase only to the testing of the sample items they were given. The educational standards and their possible application during the pilot phase were evident to most primary school teachers (74 %) but not so to academic secondary school teachers (53 %). About two thirds of the primary school teachers thought that educational standards were helpful in teaching in respect to development of lasting competences and half of the academic secondary school teachers shared that opinion. Approximately half of the primary school teachers and a quarter of the academic secondary school teachers saw an increase in students' motivation and improvement of their teaching as an effect of the educational standards. The lower secondary school teachers' estimate ranked between these two groups. Between two thirds and 75 % of the teachers of all school types described the communication between project management, coordinators and multipliers and the piloting schools as positive, feeling informed well enough. Compared to the first pilot phase an improvement had been achieved. Only 35-38 % of the teachers felt that their work in piloting educational standards was appreciated and taken seriously. A larger part of the teachers found that working with educational standards stimulated cooperation with their colleagues, specifically among colleagues teaching the same subject. Also cooperation between teachers of different subjects and grades became stronger. The majority of teachers still saw a need for improvement of the educational standards. Approximately 75 % of the teachers suggested that the sample items for the educational standards should be improved, hoping for more in-service-training and support. The majority of teachers regarded working with educational standards as an "interesting experience" but only a small number of teachers stated to have "learnt something important". Most teachers decided for "not learnt anything new" or "as clever as before". Criticism was expressed concerning the educational standards for German, because reducing the competences to measurable dimensions like grammar, punctuation and text comprehension is not regarded as an adequate strategy by some teachers, missing more creative aspects. Other teachers thought the level to be inadequate, demanding different minimal standards for different school types.

119. In 2008, the BIFIE report on the tests in year 8 and feedback to the results of educational standards (Bildungsstandards: Testungen und Ergebnissrückmeldungen auf der achten Schulstufe aus der Sicht der Praxis: Ergebnisse einer Befragung von Leiterinnen, Leitern und Lehrkräften der Pilotschulen) was published. In that study, 487 teachers and 81 school principals had to fill in questionnaires on different aspects concerning the results and feedback process of the standards tests. As far as *information* is concerned, the report came to the conclusion that the teachers and school principals knew the aims of the educational standards very well and felt well-informed. Teachers and school principals described the *students' discipline* quite high but their *motivation* quite low, but most students were willing to work hard in order to achieve good results. The *interest* on the part of the teachers seemed to be rather high, because 70 % of the teachers stated to have reflected on the results of their classes and their strengths and weaknesses intensively. Specially trained moderators were in charge of giving feedback and the communication with them was seen as well-functioning on the side of the teachers. Approximately half of the teachers were not surprised by the results of their classes



and those who were surprised were so in a positive way. More than half of the teachers benefited from the results because they helped them to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their own class and their standing in comparison to other classes. The usefulness of the educational standards lies - according to the majority of teachers - in supporting diagnostic competences rather than in aiding planning. 30 % of the teachers and heads stated that communication in their schools had been intensified and 22 % answered that questions of school quality became more of an issue, but 60 % of the teachers said that “hardly anything” changed on the school level as well as on their individual level of teaching.

120. In 2009, the BIFIE Graz (centre for educational research and evaluation) conducted a further survey aimed at gaining information about the reception of educational standards and implementation activities (Grillitsch 2010a). The sample comprised 1455 teachers and headmasters/mistresses of more than 180 schools of secondary level I, participating in the so called baseline-testing of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The objective of this testing was to assess the actual state of existing students' competences in order to achieve a reference for the regular standard tests from 2012 on and to obtain information about the efficiency of the standards' implementation.

121. Like the baseline-testing, this survey of teachers and headmasters/mistresses intended to sketch a sort of 'baseline' and was supposed to deliver information about the attitude of the actors at schools towards educational standards - how they assess their practical benefit and in how far the accompanying activities implemented so far have reached the practice. The outcomes are on the one hand supposed to provide recommendations for the further configuration of the implementation process and on the other hand provide a reference for future assessments, helping to analyse how the attitudes of teachers and headmasters/mistresses have changed or developed themselves.

122. In practice, the questionnaire included items of five subject areas, some of which had been applied in the framework of the evaluation of the pilot phases. Teachers and headmasters/mistresses were asked among others, a) how well they consider themselves informed about educational standards and where they have got information about this subject, b) where they detect chances and hopes, but also criticism and concerns connected to the implementation of the educational standards, and c) to what extent they already use educational standards for planning and designing their classes and how useful they consider these standards to be for actual teaching. The results have shown that positive aspects of educational standards are seen in their possible contribution to more objective and fair transitions to secondary level school forms (56 % consent). The creation of more transparency in the school system was considered to be downright positive (also 56 % consent). In total, it could be stated that the sample regarded the educational standards more as a general instrument for quality management of the school system, whereas they expected or acknowledged positive implications on their own practical acting to be rather insignificant. Asked about the practical use of educational standards, more than half of the sample considered them to be useful for the diagnosis of the status of a class (60 %), for self-reflection of the teacher (53 %) and for the planning and designing of the lessons (52 %).

123. Furthermore, the results hinted at the fact that at the time of the assessment, about ten months after educational standards had been legally enacted in Austria, more than two thirds (70 %) considered the concept of implementation to be too vague to assess it in total. Additionally, problematic aspects of implementation of educational standards were seen in the possibility to establish school rankings (65 %) or in the danger of neglecting process dimensions of classes (59 %).

124. Only some of the interrogated teachers (7 %) stated to be using educational standards «regularly» for the planning and designing of their classes, but the vast majority (62 %) claimed to be using them «from time to time». Regarding further training programmes, the majority of teachers (56 %) and of headmasters/mistresses (71 %) took part in a training programme on «educational standards». Nevertheless, primarily the teachers stated to get «little» (58 %) or «no» (13 %) support regarding the practical implementation of educational standards. A strong need for support was discovered concerning the provision of practical material and the improvement of further training programmes. A

determinant of primary importance for the success of the implementation process could be discerned in the provision of high quality information and supporting systems.

### **3.4.5 Controversies and Apprehensions in Connection to Students Assessments**

125. After a fundamental political agreement, the implementation of educational standards are principally accepted. However, primarily on the part of the strong Austrian teachers' unions, there are apprehensions and concerns as to the possibility of school rankings and the feared application of standard tests for teacher appraisals. Since some of the details concerning the implementation of standards and the skR are supposed to be regulated within the next years, teachers unions are eager to exert their influence in the decision making process.

## 4 System Evaluation

126. By the term system evaluation we denote several approaches at analysing the performance and quality of the educational system as a whole. We can differentiate between (a) continuous tests of inputs, processes and/or outputs of the system (system monitoring), and (b) evaluations of effects of educational policy measures in the narrower sense (programme evaluation on the system level). In this chapter we will focus on measures of the first type. Evaluations in the narrower sense (programme evaluations) will be dealt with in chapter 7.

### 4.1 CURRENT APPROACHES

#### 4.1.1 Master Plan (Overall Concept)

##### *Importance of System Evaluation for the Overall Concept*

127. Aspects of system evaluation/system monitoring nowadays assume a prominent role within the overall conception of evaluation in the Austrian school system. The approaches at system monitoring are by far more distinct and consistent than the evaluation of schools, teachers and pupils. System evaluation is based basically on four pillars (see 2.1.3 for more details):

- (a) participation of the country in international comparative studies (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS);
- (b) national testing of educational standards in the subjects German, Mathematics and English for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and German and Mathematics for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade from 2012/13 on;
- (c) analysis of the results of the partly centralised, competence-oriented maturation examination as uniform final examination on the upper secondary level, implemented with the beginning of school year 2013/14;
- (d) the periodical publishing of national educational reports based on quality indicators and scientific analyses regarding the quality of the educational system. At present, a three year cadence is scheduled.

##### *The Objectives of Improvement and Accountability*

128. The above mentioned aspects (a) and (b) deal especially with the evaluation of pupils' performance on the international scale as well as in its compliance with national educational standards. Pupils' performance is the crucial output factor system evaluation refers to.

129. In addition, the national education report analyses processes (e.g. educational flow and participation) and input factors (like educational costs and teaching personnel). The output factors treated in the educational report are more widely spread, analysing not only competences but pupils' attitude, fairness of the system as well as pupils' and teachers' well-being.

130. Ostensibly it serves the aim of accountability. Educational policy accounts for the state and quality of the school system. But the educational report also aims at "improvement": The analytical reports deal with different aspects of the educational system (e.g. quality of special education, teacher training, early school leaving, gender aspects) according to its potential to improve educational policy. In the long run, the education reports are supposed to constitute an important information base for improved political action.

### *Division of Responsibilities between Different Agencies*

131. At present, the functions of system evaluation are primarily effected by the BIFIE (see. chapter 2.1.6), assigned by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK). Therefore, the BMUKK is the first recipient of the outcomes of system evaluation. There are no other institutions that deal with system evaluation systematically. The BIFIE on the other hand, assumes its tasks in close cooperation with researchers of the pedagogical colleges, universities and extra-university research institutes. Regarding the Austrian education report for example, the BIFIE functions as coordinator and publisher. A number of researchers of different faculties (pedagogic colleges, universities, extra-university research institutes) cooperate in the contextual creation and the quality management of the report.

132. Additionally, scientists at universities are carrying out selective system wide surveys about certain topics, later incorporated into the national education report (see for example Eder 2007).

133. Apart from the BIFIE, the school administration is the central institution concerned with evaluation at schools in a broader sense. The evaluative function of the school administration is basically limited to regional and sectoral particularities of the education system and not concerned with the overall appearance:

- *federal school inspectors* for certain sectors of the school system (general education, AHS, BHS) are responsible for the evaluation and quality management of schools in one province.
- *district school inspectors* are responsible for evaluation and quality management at compulsory schools (VS, HS) of a political district.
- *vocational school inspectors* are responsible for evaluation and quality management of the vocational schools of a province.
- *subject inspectors* are responsible for evaluation and quality management of one or more subjects in different type of schools in one province.

134. The inspectorates' function is the quality management of single schools within certain geographic or political boundaries. There are considerations and statements of intent towards reconstructing these inspectorates as agencies for system evaluation, like in the Netherlands, but these approaches are not very concise. Further clarifications are to be expected in the nearer future. Further information regarding the present functions of the school administration in Austrian schools can be found in chapter 5 of this report.

### *Connections with Other Forms of Evaluation*

135. The performance assessment of pupils within the framework of international studies and the testing of educational standards are currently the most important base for system evaluation. They serve politicians as a measure for pupils' performance on an international scale. Politicians see if pupils meet the national standards and if the access to education is fairly distributed.

136. These performance assessments - especially those for future testing of educational standards – also provide an important base for the evaluation and self-evaluation of schools and teaching personnel. The test results are fed back on school and class level and serve as starting point for school and instruction development schemes. You find differentiated references to these functions in chapter 5 of this report.

## 4.1.2 Strategies of System Evaluation

### *Performance Criteria and Reference Standards*

137. At present, there are no definite performance criteria for system evaluation. In the long run, educational standards as performance norms are stipulated. Presently, these efforts lack empirical basis because the first comprehensive tests will take place in 2012.

138. Also the other instruments (international comparative studies, educational statistics, national education report) are currently working on a comparative basis (cross section of the international comparison or longitudinal section of national changes). Criteria are improvements or decline compared to empirical data in cross or longitudinal sections.

### *Instruments*

#### *International performance comparison studies (pupils) – PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS*

139. The core instruments of international performance studies are preset by the executing international organisations. On the one hand, these are the assessment of subject-specific competences in different age groups; on the other hand, a questionnaire based survey of important contextual information. These international instruments are supplemented by additional national surveys. PISA, for example, focuses on the collection of relevant information on national level in each cycle. Some of these aspects are analysed based on trend indicators in all survey cycles, like for example:

- reading habits of the juveniles,
- the use of information technology in and outside school,
- the mental state (“Befindlichkeit”) and the school success at the transition to upper secondary level,
- quality development schemes at schools, and
- workload/stress at school.

140. Other parts of the national supplementary surveys are specific for each test. For PISA 2009, the BMUKK commissioned a university consortium with the development of a national extra survey on school and student level. This consortium worked out instruments for the following topics of the pupils' census:

- characteristics of the subject German
- violence at schools
- gender roles and leisure activities
- social capital
- cultural activities

141. Next to a national part of the pupils' census there are additional surveys on school level. For PISA 2009, these examined among other issues the

- extent and methods of quality development and management on school level,
- survey of framework conditions for certain domains as for example promotion of reading skills, and

- current pedagogic and school political issues like individualisation and differentiating in classes or the situation of pupils with migration background at Austrian schools.

#### *National Performance Assessments (Educational Standards)*

142. The testing of educational standards in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade is carried out by means of subject specific competence tests (German, Mathematics and English in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, German and Mathematics in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade), and by context questionnaires. The first actual testing will be held in 2012, examining the subject Mathematics in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The following instruments are likely to be used:

- German (2013, 8<sup>th</sup> grade; 2014, 4<sup>th</sup> grade): reading, writing, conscience of spelling and speech. Multiple-choice and free answer forms are applied.
- English (2014, 8<sup>th</sup> grade): three different tests concerning the skills in reading, listening and writing have to be passed. Multiple-choice and free answer forms are used equally. Some schools also test the speaking skills. Here, the pupils have to 15 minutes talk about given topics.
- Mathematics (2012, 8<sup>th</sup> grade; 2013, 4<sup>th</sup> grade): tests concerning different competences are effected, using also open and closed answer forms.

143. Information necessary for the interpretation of the system results and feedback at schools are gathered by context questionnaires. The acquired data will allow tracking the process of essential framework conditions for pupils' performance in future times. Certain background information concerning different aspects of scholar and extra scholar learning and living conditions are collected, as for example

- demographic data (e.g. gender and migration background),
- socio economic data (e.g. profession and educational background of parents) and
- educational career of the pupil.

144. Furthermore, the pupils answer questions regarding the instruction in the tested subjects English, German and Mathematics, like for example

- class size,
- amount of time for learning,
- semester grade,
- some questions regarding the instruction from their point of view.

145. Additionally, pupils are asked about their well-being in school and classes.

146. In addition to surveys for testing the educational standards, the results of the partly centralised maturation examination in 2014 will constitute an important instrument for system evaluation. This will especially allow depicting regional differences concerning performance, maturation grades and dropout rates.

### *Evaluation of National Education Statistics and international education indicators (EAG)*

147. An important instrument of System Monitoring is the evaluation of international educational indicators (education at a glance) and the national education statistic. The Austrian Education Documentation Act from 2003 and its amendment in 2008 created the possibility of monitoring educational developments of pupils over a specific period by a set of indicators. The Education Documentation Act constitutes an important instrument for the creation of modern education statistics, providing the possibility to monitor educational developments in a longitudinal section.

*Other scientific analyses of the educational system (e.g. National Surveys concerning the mental state and satisfaction (parents, teachers, pupils))*

148. Apart from the instruments created specifically for system monitoring, scientific research of certain aspects of the education or school system constitute an important source of information. Ferdinand Eder for example analysed pupils' mental state ("Befindlichkeit") within the Austrian school system by means of representative studies in an interval of 10 years (Eder 1995, 2007). These investigations constitute a substantial basis of information for system evaluation and are incorporated into the national education report.

### *National Education Reports*

149. In the year 2009, a first national education report for Austria was published as a pilot project. It is a substantial element of system evaluation in so far as it comprises all outcomes of system related scientific examinations and data. The Austrian education report does so in a twofold manner:

- The first volume depicts, also as a chart, those data and indicators of the educational system, generated by surveys in the past years, that can be characterised explicitly as instruments for system evaluation – basically analyses of the international performance studies and available education statistics. Tests of educational standards had not taken place so far. These data and indicators are edited in two different ways:
  - on the one hand as key figure in education statistics using the traditional classification of context, input, processes, output and outcomes;
  - on the other hand from the quality perspective, applying three quality sectors: (a) competences and attitudes of pupils, (b) performance fairness and equal opportunities in the system and (c) mental state ("Befindlichkeit") of pupils in the school system, and grouping the data accordingly.
- The second volume of the education report deals with issues important for educational policy and science. All available scientific evidences concerning these issues<sup>16</sup> are edited and represented, followed by education political analyses and recommendations based on the scientific description.

150. In total, the National Education Report is a document of accountability but serves also for political analyses and advice incorporating all available databases on the educational system.

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of these issues were: „Quality in special needs education“, „Teachers as a crucial resource in the educational system: recruiting and qualification“ or „Gender balanced schools: problems, challenges and development approaches“.

### *Topics of System Evaluation*

151. Primarily, the surveys of system evaluation deal with output criteria like evaluation of academic and non-academic key competences of pupils as well as their school success (dropouts). These aspects are of primary importance for the international performance surveys, for the scheduled testing of the educational standards and for the centralised maturation examination from 2014 on.

152. The education statistics also survey pupils' school success and their advancement to secondary school forms. They represent input data about applied resources (material and personnel). The national education report relates inputs and outcomes, thus outlining the educational system in terms of equity, efficiency, and benefits.

153. Process dimensions like quality of instruction, managing schools and the regional school management are only rarely issue of the system evaluation. This is clearly a desideratum as it seems, in the long run, important to connect process dimensions with inputs (e.g. influence of applied resources on the quality of instruction) as well as with outcomes (e.g.: correspondence of teaching and learning methods with competences acquired by pupils). So far connections of data in this manner are only basically possible.

### *Assessment of Outcomes in the Light of the Objectives*

154. Concerning the criteria for the assessment of outcomes of the different approaches of system monitoring, Austria is basically oriented towards the objectives specified for education systems by the EU. The following benchmarks are supposed to be achieved by 2020<sup>17</sup>:

- At least 95 % of all children between four and the legal age of enrolment are supposed to visit preschool.
- The percentage of 15 year olds with low performance in the subjects reading, Mathematics and natural sciences is supposed to be below 15 %.
- The percentage of premature school and apprenticeship dropouts is supposed to amount to less than 10 % .
- At least 40 % of the 30- to 34-year olds are supposed to have a university grade.
- An average of at least 15 % of all adults (from 25 to 64 years) is supposed to participate in lifelong learning programmes.

155. A criteria based assessment of educational quality *on the national level* does not exist so far. The evaluation of school performance outcomes is carried out comparatively on a longitudinal section (improvement or deterioration compared to prior examinations) or in a cross section (e.g. Austria's ranking in the PISA-survey).

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<sup>17</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28\\_de.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_de.htm)



### 4.1.3 Competences of Evaluation and its Utilisation

#### *Agencies for System Evaluation*

156. The participation in international studies, the national surveys on educational standards and the publishing of the national education report are effected by the BIFIE, completely funded by the Federal Ministry (see 3.1.6). Predecessors of the BIFIE had been carrying out international performance studies (TIMSS, PISA) since the 1990s. The personnel continuity of the BIFIE and its predecessors guaranteed an accumulation of competences at the execution of these studies.

157. The BIFIE cooperates closely with groups of practitioners and researchers of university colleges of teacher education and universities, as far as planning and execution of national extra studies of the international performance surveys, planning of the national assessments of the educational standards and the planning of the centralised maturation examination are concerned. This procedure guarantees a manifold competence transfer from BIFIE to the colleges and vice versa. In this context it is important to mention that all public reports of the BIFIE regarding system monitoring but also all contributions of the national education report undergo a multiple peer review by national and international researchers of different institutions in order to guarantee its quality.

#### *Competences for the Utilisation of Outcomes on Different Levels*

158. The outcomes of the international performance studies are published as international reports, as synopsis of the essential results and as national reports and are presented to the public at press conferences and presentations. These strategies have resulted in a relatively broad public. A large number of practitioners at schools and persons interested in educational politics are relatively well informed regarding the proceedings and results of PISA for example. This does naturally not exclude the inappropriate utilisation of the PISA results in public or the political discussion.

159. Similar publishing strategies are planned for the *outcomes of the national assessments* of educational standards. A broad public will be informed about approaches and outcomes of the assessments. Moreover, the outcomes of the assessment of educational standards are worked out and illustrated on class, school and regional level. Every teacher, every headmaster/mistress and every regional education manager receives the results of their specific organisational unit compared to all other units, respectively compared to all other units with a similar social background, by means of fairness. This procedure guarantees not only the publicity but also the usability of all system monitoring surveys on all subsystem levels.

160. An important dissemination strategy for the outcomes of system evaluation has been the creation of the National Education Report. It contains all results of system evaluation of a certain period in compressed form. It addresses not only the different levels of education policy but also a broad public interested in educational matters. The National Education Report may be downloaded completely from several websites and can thus be used as a base for quality management by all office-holders in the educational system. However, the instrument of national education reporting is fairly new in Austria. Ideal ways of configuration, presentation to the public and to politicians as well as its reception on political and administrative levels will have to be developed based on experiences with the first report in 2009.

### 4.1.4 Utilisation of Outcomes

161. Since the national assessments and the centralised maturations are not entirely implemented yet, there are no experiences regarding their utilisation. Experiences exist, however, about the utilisation of international surveys and the National Education Report.

162. *International Studies*: The reports about Austria's results in the TIMSS, PISA und PIRLS studies have demonstrated inconsistent but rather problematic tendencies. The reception of the outcomes by politicians and public has been rather critical and resulted in manifold claims to reforms on the educational sector. But the argumentation with results of the international studies has not always been appropriate. Especially the results of the PISA-Study have been used as arguments for most of the reform proposals although they don't deal with the respective problems. But nevertheless, the results of international studies have raised the sensibility of the Austrian system towards outcomes of educational processes. The formation of the BIFIE, the development of educational standards and the development towards a systematic system monitoring have been indirect results of international studies and their reception by educational policy in Austria.

163. The publication of the TIMSS III results had very definite effects: The relatively poor performance of Austrian pupils in Mathematics on upper secondary level resulted in the formation of one of the largest development projects of the Austrian school system. Since the year 2000, innovative developments concerning the mathematic-scientific instruction have been promoted and decorated by the project IMST<sup>18</sup>.

164. *National Education Report*: Compared to the outcomes of the international studies, the pilot version of the National Education Report in 2009 has until now found relatively little attention. After publishing in May 2009, the report was handed to the ministry of education and the representatives of the National Council. Thereafter, it was spread to a wide group of office-holders and other interested individuals as well. Furthermore, it was provided for downloading at the websites of the BIFIE and the Ministry for Education. Finally, the report can be purchased in hard copy in book stores. The overall edition of the report amounted to 1000 copies. In June 2009, the report was presented to the cabinet and successively to the press. At the end of June 2009, the ministry staged a „background discussion“ with leading educational journalists, authors and the publishers of the NER. By and large, it can be stated that the public reception of the NER has been rather noncommittal, in spite of all these actions. After all, some departments of the ministry took the report as item of work retreats and future schemes for their own work. The school administration has dealt and still deals intensively with some chapters of the report. The publisher and some authors have been invited to planning sessions, discussions, symposiums and panel discussions.

165. The scientific reception develops more positively: Meanwhile the NER starts to become a scientific standard reference, often referred to and quoted in scientific essays on various issues of the educational system.

## **4.2 IMPLEMENTATION**

### **4.2.1 Effects of System Evaluation: Study Results**

166. Until now, there are no meta studies analysing the immediate influence of system evaluation studies on the quality and efficiency of the school system. However, the influence of international performance studies – especially PISA – on the concept of governance in the education system is relatively well documented. Accordingly, several authors (Altrichter & Heinrich 2007, Specht 2007) draw the conclusion that the international studies resulted in stronger outcome oriented tendencies in control mechanisms of the school system as opposed to the more input or process oriented tendencies before. These transformations are depicted and characterised in in the report below points 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. The formation of the BIFIE, the development and assessment of educational standards and the standardised competence-oriented maturation exam are themselves effects of this transformation process.

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<sup>18</sup> c.f. IMST: <http://imst.uni-klu.ac.at/> sowie <http://www.imst.ac.at/>

#### **4.2.2 Concerns and Controversies in Connection to System Evaluation**

167. One of the major concerns connected to new approaches of system evaluation is the strong emphasis on performance and efficiency aspects as opposed to conceptions of school as social and humane living environment. Critics argue that the over-emphasis on functional competences does not account for the educational functions of schools, having in mind that schools nowadays are forced to take over educational tasks many modern families are unable to cope with. One possible consequence of this criticism would be a stronger emphasis on the sensitive dimensions and extra-functional competences like learning receptivity, empathy, social behaviour but also self-confidence and assertiveness in the assessments of educational standards and the evaluation of schools in general. Even today there are approaches and concepts of quality evaluation stressing the more extra-functional effects of schools. Examples are the quality concept for vocational schools in Austria, QIBB<sup>19</sup>, the schemed national qualification framework (see 1.2.1) or pilot projects in some provinces of Austria, pursuing the more non-functional quality concepts of schools (e.g. Specht 2007b).

168. A second concern, mainly articulated by teachers, is that a comprehensive evaluation of schools, scheduled in the framework of educational standards, might result in a ranking of schools like in the English system. The conception of school rankings according to their quality has an extremely negative connotation especially with teachers. Their arguments against this system are,

- that it tends to impose the responsibility for the quality of educational processes solely on the teachers,
- that it is impossible to assess and control the relevant environmental factors appropriately, and
- that these rankings might result in the introduction of market mechanisms in the educational system at the expenses of socially deprived families (social homogenisation of high and low performing schools).

#### **4.2.3 Perceived Difficulties of Implementation**

169. One of the major problems of implementing a continuous system monitoring in the past has been the complete absence of institutions and infrastructure to carry out cross-system assessments. These difficulties have been mostly overcome with the founding and formation of the BIFIE. This institute has been installed explicitly in order to carry out the essential tasks of system evaluation.

170. The scope for criticism or opposition towards system evaluation is not very broad since the respective tasks (international studies, educational standards, national education reports, standardised, competence oriented maturation exam) are all secured by law. Indeed, there is at present no systematically organised opposition against the respective activities. On the contrary, there is a broad consent about a constant system of monitoring being an essential instrument of quality control. Parts of the teaching staff show the strongest reservations. But even there, criticism towards the presently favoured approaches is relatively modest.

#### **4.2.4 Perspectives of Different Stakeholders**

171. As already stated, system evaluation itself is largely uncontroversial apart from the above mentioned anxieties. Above all controversial are the aspects of costs and logistic efforts of the national assessment – especially since financial and logistic expenses have formerly been unknown within the Austrian system. Teachers' organisations show relatively little comprehension assuming that these efforts are at the expenses of the pedagogic equipment of schools and instruction.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.qibb.at/>

### **4.3 POLITICAL INITIATIVES**

172. The current approaches of system evaluation (national assessments, education reports etc.) are relatively new. Current political initiatives are dealing with their implementation and efficient application.

## 5 School Assessment

173. This chapter addresses current concepts in Austria aiming at evaluation and quality development at schools as organisational and pedagogic units. It will become evident that there is presently no overall concept of evaluation, assessment and quality development in Austrian schools. In fact, old historically shaped concepts and new forms of school evaluation exist independently next to one another without being combined by unifying legal acts. Furthermore, there are distinct discrepancies between general and vocational school forms. A characterisation of the present situation of „school assessment“ can not refrain from referring to historical developments of the past two decades.

### 5.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

174. When in the 80s and 90s of the last century the discussion about school quality and the question of criteria and development factors of „good schools“ moved to the focus of discussions in educational politics (OECD 1989), also Austria began to push forward considerations about how to support quality of single schools. On the legal level, the expansion of school autonomy has to be mentioned. The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment of the school organisation law (1993) granted expanded possibilities of reorganising a certain number of lessons about alternative subject matters, thus setting special priorities in the curriculum. The underlying assumption being that schools would use these possibilities to sharpen their substantial profile, to improve the quality of their offer and gain more acceptance of parents and pupils.

175. These developments in the context of school autonomy were accompanied by a discussion about school quality in a narrower sense. The question was which proceedings and instruments were necessary in order to enable schools to raise their quality and outcomes and to account to the public for their achieved results.

176. The essential concepts, favoured at that time, were „*school development*“ or organisational development, basically focused on realising „a good school“ at a single site. Based on the assumption, that quality of the educational system is determined by the sum of its institutions. In Austria in 1997, an assessment was published by Peter Posch and Herbert Altrichter (Posch & Altrichter 1997), basically proposing the focussing of the entire system of quality management on single institutions, enabling them to develop their own independent systems and procedures of quality management (QM) (loc.cit.). Quality in the sense of „good school“ was supposed to be achieved by quality development on site, assessing established quality management systems as a feature of good schools. Until now, no effective standard for reasonable efficient quality management systems adapted to the school context has been developed. However, different approaches and procedures are applied, mostly copied from the economic sector and adapted to school aspects. Only in recent times, depending on the province, the establishment of a small number of concepts as a sort of informal standard is discernable. The following two elements are constitutive for all these concepts:

- the principle of self-evaluation aiming at establishing and cultivation of professional self-reflection in the school practice. Schools are supposed to be able to carry out quality control of their own educational offers independently.
- the principle of *development planning* of *school programmes*, in which schools account for their practice and on the other hand plan their development in the sense of an internally concretised quality connotation.

177. Until the turn of the century, a broad consensus about these two principles has established itself within the educational science community and many practitioners. All schools were supposed to take part in the self-evaluation of their own practice and to develop school programmes, stating the medium-term objectives and methods for quality development and constituting the base of quality circles (planning – execution – evaluation).

178. Despite the relatively broad consensus within the system regarding the principles of self-evaluation and school programme development, no legal regulation or establishment of these principles took place. The ministry had assigned a task force for education to prepare a legal regulation for school programmes and self-evaluation (PQS 2002). Moreover, a website was launched, providing schools that voluntarily start programmes for quality development with help and support (see [www.qis.at](http://www.qis.at)). Until now, self-evaluation and school programme development have not been legally binding.

## **5.2 CURRENT PRACTICE**

179. As indicated above, the system of evaluation at schools is currently subject to change. Due to the fact that the corresponding amending laws are to be effected in 2012 with long transitional periods, the current practice of school evaluation is outlined as it presents itself at the moment. Paragraph 5.4 (Policy Initiatives) illustrates the new laws and developments en bloc.

### **5.2.1 Overall Conception of School Evaluation**

180. In principle, there is currently no binding overall conception of school evaluation. Only regionally, sectorally and temporally different developments, presented in the following chapter (see also chapter 3.1.3):

#### *School Programmes and Self-Evaluation*

181. As already mentioned above (4.1), there is and has been a consensus among relevant stakeholders as to quality development and management at schools being best guaranteed by school imminent procedures. A lot of schools support this opinion. They have established or are busy establishing school programmes and they are evaluating for themselves their own practice according to the criteria of their school programmes. On an empirical level it becomes evident that until 2003, nearly half of all schools have been working at the implementation of quality cycles (Haider 2006), while still most of the headmasters/mistresses held the (correct) opinion that working on systems for quality development and quality management was not mandatory.

182. The majority of general educational schools, working with these internal quality cycles are guided by standards of the internet support platform QIS (quality at schools). The schools of the vocational school system are working according to the standards of the internet portal for vocational schools, [www.qibb.at](http://www.qibb.at). The relevant difference between general and vocational schools in this context will be highlighted further below in this chapter. The support system QIS includes the following elements:

- *A general guideline of school development.* This guideline gives general orientation. It presents the topic, sketches out the philosophy of the initiative „quality at schools“ and puts it into a context of justification. The text defines five quality sectors of scholar activities and describes the most important elements of a school programme. It comprises first proposals and hints for the implementation of Q.I.S. and establishes a scale for promising school programmes and reliable self-evaluation.
- *Specific method proposals for quality development.* These are based on the premise that process design holds a prime if not crucial role within the framework of quality management and development. They offer clear and evident working steps and designs, bearing in mind especially the emotional and social aspects of such processes.

- *Method pool:* The method pool is supposed to enable single individuals and groups to collect and evaluate manifold data of all sectors of school and instruction. The given methods and instruments (quantitative and qualitative) are designed for immediate and flexible use and can be applied without prior knowledge in the field of evaluation.

183. These materials are grouped around five contextual areas, in their implementation assumedly essential for the quality of a school. These areas are:

- teaching and learning
- living environment class and school
- internal school partnership (“Schulpartnerschaft”) and external relations
- school management
- professionalism and human resources development

184. The school programme and the evaluation activities could relate to one or more of these dimensions. QIS, however, demands that the aspect of teaching and learning as the „core business“ of schools is supposed to be incorporated into the quality development scheme. QIS even defines more clearly what can be understood by the term „school programme“ and which elements should be contained. Accordingly, the following five elements should be dealt with in the school programme:

- General outline of the school („mission statement“)
  - What are the common values the school is committed to? - „Philosophy“ and basic pedagogic orientation of the school are supposed to be highlighted by a few concise guidelines.
- State of development and objectives
  - What has been achieved, what are the challenges and what are the objectives of the school? - a set of objectives of different quality areas are selected supposed to be achieved within the next years.
- Achievement of objectives
  - Which measures are the most suitable to achieve the set objectives? How can one discern the success of these measures? - The school program contains precise measures for all objectives and describes their part in the achievement of the goals.
- Action plan for implementation
  - What is to be done precisely in order to achieve the planned projects? - The single steps are outlined; necessary resources, binding time tables and clear responsibilities are put down.
- Activities for the survey
  - How is the progress to be surveyed? - The evaluation of the achieved goals has to be carried out according to transparent criteria. Point of time, methods and planned activities of school internal evaluation have to be determined.

185. The development of school programmes and internal self-evaluation are the most common forms of school assessment even nowadays, although they have up to now not been legally binding.

#### *Assessment of Schools by the School Administration*

186. The traditional and oldest form of school assessment is carried out by the school administration. As already stated in chapter 3.1.3, the evaluation of schools, according to an administrative act of the

year 1999, rests with the members of the school administration (“Inspektorat”). It carries out a so called „proportional“ inspection, depending in its intensity on the credibility of the school internal quality development system.

187. The regulations concerning the inspection of schools are illustrated in chapter 3.1.3. Once again may be hinted at the paradox situation that the regulation of evaluation of schools by the school administration is strongly related to the systems of quality development at the schools themselves (school programmes, self-evaluation), although there has been no binding character for those. For this reason there are different forms of school-inspection in the system, mainly corresponding to the actual grade of involvement of quality management at the schools. But there are regional differences in the execution of school-inspections as well: in the province Styria for example, a so called “team-inspection” has been effected for some years: two or more inspectors, responsible for different regions, visit the schools of a certain region. They talk to the management, to the teaching staff, to parents and students, they observe selected classes, analyse documents (in particular documents concerning the self-evaluation of the school) and they compile a common report. The inspections in other provinces are more “traditional”: only one inspector visits the schools of “his/her” school district.

#### *Data Oriented School Development*

188. School programme and self-evaluation are the most important internal forms of quality development and management on school level. The assessment of schools by the school administration is so far the most important external element of school assessment. Until recently, there have been no procedures for external and objective quality evaluation of schools. Only recently a development towards a stronger evidence-based form of school development at single schools is discernible. This corresponds to the above described development and testing of educational standards as well as to the centralisation of examinations at the end of upper secondary level.

189. The testing of educational standards, executed regularly once a year from school year 2011/12 on, is combined with a feedback of the results towards schools. This is regulated in the respective ministerial order on educational standards<sup>20</sup>. This means that all schools are supposed to receive feedbacks about the tested competences of their pupils, enabling them to establish school development activities accordingly. Furthermore, every teacher gets the aggregated results of his/her class. These outcomes of schools and classes and the resulting subject specific performance profiles are supposed to constitute an important starting point for the focussed development of instruction and for raising the quality of schools in general. This effect is supported by trained „feedback moderators“ assisting schools in the interpretation of tables and charts indicating the outcomes of individual schools and classes. These feedback moderators are experts for the interpretation of test data, especially trained by the BIFIE for the interpretation of standard testing outcomes. The schools can ask for assistance of these moderators concerning the interpretation of their testing outcomes. Further plans include the engagement of experts for school and teaching development at the schools' disposal in order to support and advise them regarding adequate steps at quality development.

190. The evaluation of the feedback process and the utilisation of outcomes are supposed to hint at possible effects of this external evaluation of schools by standard tests on the quality development. In the autumn of 2009, an experimental testing of educational standards in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at 204 schools of secondary level 1 took place. The feedback process of results towards schools also was tested. An accompanying evaluation surveyed in how far schools considered these feedbacks to be useful and important (Grillitsch, 2010). The results have shown the following:

- Two thirds of the participating teachers have dealt with the feedback outcomes more or less thoroughly.

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<sup>20</sup> „Standard testings ... are to be effected and their outcomes are to be fed back to schools. The analyses of the standard testings and their feedback have to be executed in a way that allows their application for quality development at schools“ (Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur über Bildungsstandards im Schulwesen, § 3 (4))



- From two thirds to three quarters of the participants praised the clarity and comprehensibility of the outcome feedback. However, only 40% regarded them as practice-oriented.
- 30% of the participants claimed that the results might have an effect on their instruction.
- More than 30% of the teachers found the results of their classes better than expected, only 6% had to face worse results. Accordingly about 40% of the teachers found themselves encouraged by the feedback and only 3% discouraged.
- According to the participating headmasters/mistresses, the feedback resulted in significant stimulation of professional communication at schools. In as much as a quarter of the cases, the outcomes resulted in substantial modification decisions.

191. At large, the outcomes of evaluation demonstrate that a well-planned and sensitive feedback of objectively surveyed quality data can attract attention on the part of teachers and may result in the stimulation of quality development activities. Prior to the educational standards and their testing, especially practitioners at schools raised concerns over the standards being only an element for external control of teachers. These concerns might have been dispelled in the course of substantial experiences with the testing.

192. Currently, testing and feedback of educational standards is still in its development and planning stage. It is to be expected, that external administrative tests of school performance and quality will play an increasingly important role as tools for the self-evaluation of schools.

#### *QIBB: Quality Development in the Vocational Sector*

193. In the introduction of this chapter, it has been stated that, at present, there is no overall concept for evaluation, assessment and quality development of schools in Austria. There are different concepts of school evaluation next to one another, unlinked, and not connected by unifying legal regulations. Three different approaches of school evaluation have been presented, internal school quality development according to QIS, external evaluation by the school administration and evaluation by external assessment and its feedback towards schools.

194. Another differentiation has to be made between the two sectors of the general education and the vocational education. Whereas the characterisations so far only apply to the general education, the vocational education has established a separate consistent system of quality development and management, operating under the name QIBB (Qualität in der Beruflichen Bildung,) and organised within the framework of a proper internet portal ([www.qibb.at](http://www.qibb.at)).

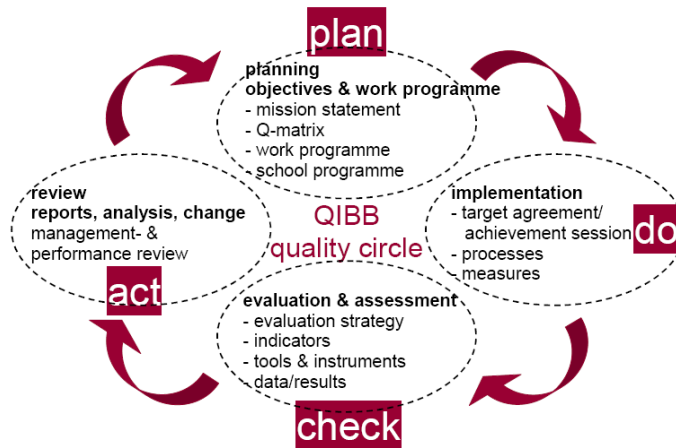
195. QIBB is based on the already depicted supporting system for school internal quality development QIS. This system has been developed into a comprehensive system for quality development, comprising all school forms and schools of the vocational school system and reclaiming a significantly higher level of commitment. QIBB shows the following constitutive elements<sup>21</sup>:

- QIBB encompasses not only schools but also the administrative levels of the respective province and the federal ministry: The model provides that schools as well as the school administration (province level) and the section vocational education within the BMUKK (federal level) submit their activities to regular evaluations and constant improvements. The basic working principles for process and outcome quality are the same on all three levels.

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<sup>21</sup> The following description follows the internet presentation of QIBB.

- All levels work according to a quality circle structured like follows<sup>22</sup>:
  - The step of *planning* means defining and putting down objectives, activities, desired outcomes (output) and indicators, showing the achievement of a target.
  - The *implementation of the work and school programme* is effected by individuals, working or learning in an educational institution or in administration - pupils, students, teachers, staff members, managers etc. - setting substantial activities and measures in order to work and learn accordingly.



- *Evaluation* means systematically analysing and assessing a certain "topic" in order to guarantee and further develop its quality and value. "Topic" encompasses frameworks, processes, activities, products etc. or their effects.
  - *Assessment* means comparing the outcomes of the evaluation with the original planning. A *quality report* states the evaluation results and compares them to the original plans designed to improve the situation. The result of this comparison enters further planning.
- The quality circle is based upon three documents each operating level develops for itself. The documents developed for the QIBB initiative serve as role models:
  - A *mission statement*, containing the long term target orientation and the core messages of task and self-conception of an organisation;
  - A *quality target matrix* (q-matrix), implementation of the mission statement. Four quality areas (teaching and learning, quality, economy and society, internationality) and their according long and medium term objectives and sub objectives, implementation measures leading to target achievement and their respective indicators and evaluation methods and instruments are put down in a chart.
  - A *work or school programme*, determining the strategic and operative management of an organisation. At QIBB it consists of the mission statement to illustrate long term perspectives and the development and implementation plan, referring to medium and short term objectives.
- QIBB provides an evaluation platform for all vocational schools. There is a custom made set of centrally developed evaluation instruments available for each school level – for the *individual feedback* and for the *system feedback* as well.

Individual feedback: a guideline provides materials, instruments and methods, theoretical background information and illustrative practical examples for planning, executing and assessment of individual feedbacks (e.g. pupil → teacher, teacher → headmaster/mistress, parents → school etc.).

<sup>22</sup> The chart is taken of the QIBB website - [http://www.qibb.at/fileadmin/content/qibb/Bilder/GIF/Qualitaetskreislauf\\_gesamt.GIF](http://www.qibb.at/fileadmin/content/qibb/Bilder/GIF/Qualitaetskreislauf_gesamt.GIF)

System feedback: within the framework of the QIBB system, the evaluation of the quality of work processes and outcomes is assessed in order to identify optimisation requirements and plan modification measures. The QIBB evaluation platform provides a pool of evaluation instruments.

Within the QIBB framework (like the QIS) evaluation is carried out as self-evaluation. Every institution determines an evaluation strategy and defines,<sup>23</sup>

- which range of action or processes and outcomes
- by what procedures
- by whom and
- when evaluation is carried out;
- which indicators serve as markers for target achievement; and
- what happens with data and outcomes of the evaluation.

196. In general, QIBB provides a framework for school evaluation and quality development incorporating all schools of the vocational level. It is centred on the systematic safeguarding and development of instructional quality at all involved schools.

#### *Characteristical Features of School Evaluation*

197. The characteristic feature of school evaluation is the fact that *self-evaluation* is a central issue - especially for those models based on QIS or QIBB. But also external evaluation by the school administration is based on the schools' self-evaluation, its form and intensity relying on the intensity and credibility of the internal quality development system of the school. Only the data-based school development relies primarily on externally gathered information about the school. But also this feedback of data serves to provide schools with more objective information for their self-evaluation.

#### *Objectives of School Evaluation within the Overall Concept of Evaluation*

198. The objectives of school evaluation as a part of the overall concept of evaluation are the optimisation of their contribution to the quality of the school system. A lot of experts consider the quality of single schools to be the main starting point for raising the quality of the system as a whole. But the objectives of school evaluation do not necessarily refer exclusively to the system level. The main objective remains the quality development of the school itself – independent of its contribution to the quality of the system. Evaluation on school level is supposedly a central possibility to detect strengths and weaknesses in the development of single schools and thus a starting point for focused quality development.

#### *Division of Responsibility*

199. As self-evaluation is at the focus of school evaluation, the central authorities for this self-evaluation are headmasters/mistresses and teachers effecting this self-assessment. On the part of the teachers, there are mainly small steering committees that participate in the school evaluation, especially at larger schools. However, all teachers are challenged to perform self-evaluation of their own classes, for example by means of student feedback. External authorities are the school administration or the inspectorate. Other authorities (e.g. BIFIE) only provide data for self-evaluation or external assessment by the school administration.

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<sup>23</sup> The schools are not completely free to choose the topics of evaluation: the ministry establishes a framework for certain key issues (e.g. appraisal), mandatory for the evaluation at the locations.

### *Connection to other Forms of Evaluation*

200. Approaches at school evaluation are connected to other forms of evaluation:

- Individual feedbacks of teachers (by pupils and/or parents) according to methods of „teacher appraisal“ could serve as database for school evaluation. These individual feedbacks can be aggregated on school level. They serve as parts of the school evaluation.
- The members of the school administration (“Inspektorat”) are not only responsible for the external evaluation of schools but also for the assessment of teachers and school management performance. These assessments can also enter the evaluation of schools.
- The assessments of education standards described in chapter 3 on the pupils level could be aggregated on school level and serve as database for self-evaluation.

## **5.2.2 Methods and Procedures**

### *Performance Criteria and Reference Standards*

201. Until now, there are no reference standards concerning the external assessment by the school administration. Criteria for the evaluation are developed by the assessing inspectors themselves. Where and when pupils assessments are starting points for self and external evaluation, the aggregated reference values of the other participating schools are used as performance criteria.

### *Subjects of School Evaluation*

202. The instruments for self-assessment provided within the qis.at and qibb.at frameworks cover most of the conceivable quality aspects (school management; educational leadership; compliance with regulations; student performance; school development; school environment; infrastructure; links with the community; organisation of teaching; monitoring of teaching quality). The schools decide on the specific subjects they chose within the framework of self-evaluation. QIS demands that the aspect „teaching and learning“, covering the instructional quality, has to be analysed. QIBB sets annual priorities in evaluation, all schools are supposed to cover in their evaluation activities.

203. The responsibility of the school administration covers all the above mentioned aspects. It is important to keep in mind that the main task of the school administration (inspectorate) remains the assessment of the self-evaluation of schools. It only evaluates directly where the self-assessment of the schools is regarded as insufficient.

### *Methodical and Regional Aspects*

204. As can be seen above, school evaluation is primarily a process of self-assessment or self-evaluation. Partly, regularly in the future, schools are provided with results of the performance evaluation of their pupils<sup>24</sup>, serving as objective quality criteria in order to provoke school development activities. The quality assessment by the school administration takes place within the framework of school visitations and discussions with headmasters/mistresses, parents, pupils and teachers. It is enacted whenever a self-evaluation of a school is supposedly insufficient. The execution of external evaluations by the school administration is carried out according to distinct formal regulations depending on the different provinces.

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<sup>24</sup> The feedback of central evaluations of student performance applies only to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades (educational standards) and to the 12<sup>th</sup> grad (central maturation exam). Only the latter are relevant for vocational schools.

### 5.2.3 Competences

#### *Qualification of the Evaluators*

205. External evaluators are above all officials of the school administration, generally selected out of experienced teachers and headmasters/mistresses by the regional school administration (“Landes-schulrat”). Their formal qualification as school evaluators is very heterogenous. There is up to now no formal curriculum for the schooling of inspectors as school evaluators. The members of the school administration undergo an evaluation only by their superior authority, either at the federal ministry or at the school administrations of the provinces.

#### *The Role of Schools and School Managements*

206. The preparation and instruction of headmasters/mistresses as evaluators is, like that of the inspectors, presently insufficient. There are only a few systematic schoolings and trainings. Further trainings depend on the individual initiative or on programmes of single provinces, not very homogenous in general. As far as schools are concerned, the situation of available supporting systems for evaluation is better:

- the website QIS, providing a comprehensive supporting system for self-evaluation, school programmes and school development exists since the year 1999 and has been extended and improved continuously. It is used by various schools throughout the country and has a very high international reputation.
- the QIBB initiative for the vocational school system is a universal, school form comprehensive supporting system for quality development. It assists the participating schools by providing evaluation activities and their implementation as steps for quality development in manifold ways.
- the feedbacks the schools receive as results of the standard tests of their pupils are edited in a way that makes them assessable even for persons without any statistical training. Moreover, these feedbacks are supposed to be facilitated at schools by trained moderators, giving first hints as to applicability and possible evolutionary steps.

207. Based on these supporting systems, it may be assumed that numerous headmasters/mistresses are able to benefit from these outcomes of self and external evaluation and use them as a basis for the development of school programmes and substantial development perspectives for their schools.

#### *Qualification Initiatives*

208. All headmasters/mistresses pass a so called „school management course“ in the first phase of their occupation, consisting also of school development and evaluation elements. These qualification programmes are provided by the university colleges of teacher education. However, extension and quality of these qualification programmes are –as far as evaluating modules are concerned– not very homogenous.

209. The similar holds true for the inspectors who have experienced no systematic training concerning evaluation and quality development. In the course of the last decade, extra occupational training courses on evaluation for the school administration, elaborated by scientific experts, have been offered and funded by the federal ministry for education. However, participation in these courses is voluntary, the range of these qualification activities accordingly low.

210. Currently, one of the major problems is constituted by the fact that the inspectors are evaluators and development advisors in personal union. The last function is also carried out by professional school development advisors, some working independently, but mostly employed by the university

colleges of teacher education. These advisors are sometimes delegated by inspectors in order to support the schools, in other cases they are engaged by the school itself. In general, the potential concerning professional development advisors is still insufficient. Above all, as far as the moderation of the fed back results of the educational standards tests are concerned, additional qualification programmes will be effected in the next years.

211. All in all, systematic training and further training of evaluators as well as development advisors constitute a major desideratum within the current evaluation framework. Improvements and extensions are scheduled on the part of the Austrian Ministry of Education: counselling for schools is supposed to be institutionalised, professionalised and coordinated more efficiently, the competences of moderators are to be defined more precisely and the training and further training activities are to be standardised (s. 5.4.1).

#### **5.2.4 Application of Outcomes**

212. All forms of school evaluation are carried out with the solitary and unambiguous intention to promote development processes at schools. Sanctions for educational or management staff – be it in connection to negative evaluation results – are currently not combined with evaluation and are not planned for the future. Thus, we are talking about „low stakes“ evaluations.

213. In general, outcomes of school evaluations are not published. Neither are the school specific results of the educational standards tests. However, numerous schools have published results of evaluations as self-presentations on their homepages – especially when the results shed a positive light on the school.

### **5.3 IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **5.3.1 Studies on the Effects of School Evaluation**

214. There are three studies on the relevance of evaluation at schools and the related effects:

- in connection to the PISA examinations (2003), headmasters/mistresses of PISA-schools were asked, in how far they executed and pushed activities of quality management at their schools. In 2003, QM and self-evaluation activities were significantly more common than in 2000. More than half of the schools were working on consistent quality circles (school programme – self-evaluation – programme modification), although official regulations were not binding (see Haider 2006).
- within the framework of a pilot project for data-oriented school development in the Styria province, headmasters/mistresses were asked in how far they considered external students surveys and feedback towards schools as helpful tools for the quality development at schools. The vast majority of the teachers and nearly all headmasters/mistresses as well as the members of the inspectorate regarded student assessment data and result feedback towards schools as important measures for evaluation and as helpful for a focussed school development (Specht & Grabensberger 2007: 83-94).
- In the course of the first provisional testing of educational standards, results were fed back to schools. Consequently management and teaching staff have been interviewed as to how they estimate the value of the feedback for the school and instruction development. The most important outcomes of these interviews and the consequences have been mentioned above (4.2.1).

215. As shown, these evidences rely on the perception of practitioners at schools. However, there are no objective examinations about the positive effects of school assessments on the quality of teaching and learning.

### **5.3.2 Controversies and Concerns in Connection to School Evaluation**

216. As can be seen in the previous sections, there is currently no compulsory, school form encompassing concept of evaluation in Austria. Four approaches with different grades of liability stand next to one another (see chapter 4.2.1):

- voluntary self-evaluation of schools according to QIS (general school level)
- liable self-evaluation according to QIBB (vocational school level)
- external evaluation by the school administration according to different approaches in the different provinces
- external evaluation within the framework of national school performance assessments (educational standards) by feedback of school specific outcomes

217. In general, there are concerns about evaluation lacking liability and commitment and therefore having too little pronounced competences. Current deliberations and efforts are directed at combining these approaches in a reasonable manner (s. Section 5.4.1).

### **5.3.3 Perceived Impediments and Difficulties**

#### *School-internal Evaluation*

217. The major difficulty in the all-encompassing implementation of competently executed self-evaluation, is the fact that it demands a relatively high number of teachers' working hours, lacking from their original function, the instruction. This results in the necessity to remunerate the work concerning self-evaluation separately. Teachers' organisations and unions constantly hint to this aspect. Currently, politicians are not ready to make a start on these matters, basically because of budgetary considerations.

#### *External Evaluation by the School Administration*

218. The major impediments of a competently effected external evaluation of schools by the school administration are the different qualification conditions of this group of persons and the absence of a uniform qualification concept. A nationwide reorganisation of the school administration in the sense mentioned above (2.3.1) encounters resistance of the provinces, that see their competences diminished. At present it is unclear how this conflict will develop.

#### *Empirical Quality Assessment*

219. A systematic empirical quality assessment of schools will be realised in connection to the national tests of the educational standards from the year 2012 on. The related difficulties and concerns have already been depicted in the chapters 3.2.2 and 3.3.2.

### 5.3.4 Perspectives of Different Stakeholders

220. As already mentioned above, political representatives of the federal state and the provinces have different opinions concerning the reorganisation of the school administration. There is an interesting empirical outcome, concerning the question of self-evaluation and quality development at schools. In the already mentioned headmasters/mistresses assessments in the framework of PISA (Haider 2006), headmasters/mistresses have also been asked about supporting and inhibiting circumstances for the implementation of quality management activities at schools. The result showed that especially the professional body of teachers (unions) have been perceived as inhibiting factors, whereas parents and pupils showed a positive attitude towards self-evaluation.

## 5.4 POLITICAL INITIATIVES

### 5.4.1 Initiatives for Improvement of Efficiency of School Evaluation

221. After the attempt to legally stipulate school programmes and self-evaluation as forms of quality development at schools had failed at the begin of the 2000s, questions about system control and management resumed their priority, again connected to the publishing of the PISA results - manifesting itself in the political agenda to develop educational standards, in order to reliably guarantee learning performance of the pupils on the system level.

222. Interestingly enough, the educational standards contributed to the development of new forms of quality management on school level. By combining the development and assessment of educational standards with the task to analyse the outcomes school specifically and feed back the results towards the schools, a first comprehensive school evaluation based on performance of pupils had been effected.

223. As a consequence of this development, the Austrian Ministry of Education initiated a bill aiming for the first time at restructuring quality development on the school level, approaches to external evaluation by means of central output tests and existing traditions of school inspections and putting all of them into a systematic context.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the bill provides for cross-linking the different levels of quality development (system – district – school). The bill passed in May 2011 and is supposed to come into effect in September 2012. The relative long interim period between the passing and the commencement of the act is due to the intention of creating new framework conditions, in order to start a comprehensive reconstruction of the school evaluation system and support school development.

224. The following paragraph shortly describes the elements and the destination route of this reconstruction:

#### *External Data for Self-evaluation at Schools*

225. The prospective wide range of externally collected data about schools, available for their self-evaluation, plays a very important role for the new approaches to school evaluations:

- As repeatedly stated, annual overall assessments of educational standards in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade are to be effected in the following years – on annually alternating subjects. Apart from that, the maturation exam will be held centrally and will be standardised as from 2014. The feedbacks of the testing outcomes constitute important databases for the self-evaluation of schools.

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<sup>25</sup> 28. Bundesgesetz: Änderung des Bundes-Schulaufsichtsgesetzes, 20.5.2011



- Apart from these formal and national assessments, there is an increasing number of surveys for voluntary participation of schools. For example, the BIFIE offers so called informal competence testings (IKM) via internet, similar to the testings of the national education standards, which the teachers of different grades can utilise to conduct competence testings with their students. The feedback is effected online in real-time.
- The web page QIS.AT is about to offer instruments for assessing student satisfaction, willingness to learn and more important interdisciplinary orientations and competences of the students (QIS-online). The schools receive their feedback immediately via internet.
- In the area of vocational education, schools are free to make use of an abundant supply of instruments for self-evaluation on the qibb.at internet platform.

### *Compulsory Self-Evaluation and Development Programmes at Schools*

226. The bill provides for all schools (as well as the superior administrative units) to compile development programmes (quality reports) on a regular basis, serving at the same time as a basis for self-evaluation and as an item of objective agreements in order to increase the educational quality of schools. This bill regulates for the first time a consistent and compulsory quality management of all schools.

227. According to the new act, the quality and development reports of all schools have to contain the following elements:

1. key issues, the school is willing to address in the next development period,
2. key issue related objectives,
3. key issue related retrospectives and actual state analyses,
4. activities for the implementation of the targets,
5. activities for controlling the achievement of objectives,
6. further training schemes, as well as
7. information on the strategic and operative quality management of the school.

228. In this context, the mandatory self-evaluation of schools is very important. The schools are obliged to utilise externally collected data (educational standards, central maturation exam, IKM, QIS-Online etc.) but also individually collected external perceptions (e.g. interviews of graduates, student feedback, viewpoints of parents or critical friends of different schools for their self-evaluation and to incorporate the outcomes into their own development schemes.

229. At the same time, the clear definition of quality criteria at the school and thus the target criteria for school development: the act provides for a development of a “national quality framework”, defining the criteria for school and tuitional quality based on a common essence and differentiated according to schooltype. This framework is rooted in the existing initiatives Q.I.S. (Qualität in Schulen) and QIBB (Qualitätsinitiative Berufsbildung). It describes the important processes on and between the levels of the school system (e.g. objective agreements, self-evaluation and external feedback system to analyse the efficiency of taken activities and to guarantee for a lean planning and reporting system). The instruction (teaching and learning) as the main business of schools is at the centre of this national quality framework.

### *Inspectors as „Quality managers“*

230. The new legal acts also redefine the function and role of the former inspectors. The inspectors are responsible for the quality management in their specific districts, based on agreements on objectives the Federal Minister elaborated with the inspectors as regional education managers. These represent nationwide strategic objectives for the school system on the regional level. The inspectors on their part form the management level of schools and formulate agreements on objectives with headmasters and headmistresses, substantiating the objectives of the federal state and the regions on school level. These

target agreements between regional quality managers and schools are represented in the school development programmes.

231. As a consequence, the inspectors lose their status as external evaluators but support the schools in

- formulating objectives for their school development programme,
- detecting feasible methods and instruments for self-evaluation,
- selecting moderators for the quality development of schools and instruction.

232. The inspectors' evaluative function is reduced to controlling the legal conformity of the school's activities and to controlling the adherence to the formulated target agreements. Furthermore, they might initiate external evaluation by third parties if they consider the activities and instruments of self-evaluation to be insufficient or not promising enough.

234. It remains important that the qualification of the regional quality managers is guaranteed by verifiable competences. This leads to expectations of distinct training and further training guidelines and corresponding curricula for these functions.

#### *Extension and revaluation of development counselling of schools*

233. In correspondence to the tasks the schools have to fulfil (self-evaluation, development planning), the demand for counselling and support by external experts and specialists is constantly increasing. The availability of external counselling for schools therefore constitutes the fourth mainstay for the new concept of quality development at schools. For this reason, the BMUKK considers it to be its task, in close cooperation with university colleges of teacher education and other partners, to create the foundations for a sufficiently high number of highly qualified counsellors for Austrian schools.

234. A programmatic scheme of the BMUKK for the next two years considers the following steps:

- development of a grid of competences for the professional field „consulting service for schools“, defining the requirements for certified counsellors;
- determination of the existing demand of consultation as well as the current possibilities of training and further training;
- coordination of the future further training offers at university colleges of teacher education;
- publishing of a database of consultants with verifiable qualification – thus improving the schools' possibilities of selecting appropriate consultants.

235. The combination of these four modules – external school assessments, mandatory development scheming and self-evaluation, creation of regional educational managers and the improvement of the supply of school external consultants – is expected to contribute to gradually establishing evidence-based developments on the level of individual schools.

236. In Austria, the above mentioned options are currently in the focus of discussion. In how far their implementation is effected remains open for now. Presumably, the experiences with the first comprehensive tests of educational standards, their feedback to schools and the reactions of the schools themselves towards the outcomes will be awaited before taking further steps. The BIFIE is charged with the systematic research and assessment of the dealing of schools with educational standards and testing results, in order to obtain an evidence-based base for further activities.

## 6 Teacher appraisal

### 6.1 CURRENT PRACTICE

237. In Austria, the assessment and evaluation of teachers' work in the overall evaluation context is currently an aspect of minor importance. This can be seen in the recently published TALIS study (2008) in which only 31% of the Austrian teachers stated to be evaluated by the school management once or twice a year – significantly less than the OECD average (36%). 18% of the teachers state that they have never been internally evaluated, 43% state that they have never been externally evaluated. 82% of the teachers state to be at most evaluated externally twice. Furthermore, teachers at lower secondary schools are significantly more often evaluated internally as well as externally as it is the case with teachers of the AHS. Finally, the TALIS study of Austrian teachers shows that the internal or external feedback has a comparatively low effect on the instruction. An important factor might be the fact that for 97% of the teachers, the assessment or the feedback has no effect on their salary. And for only „20% of the Austrian teachers, the assessment or feedback has an effect on their further training possibilities“(TALIS 2008: 6).

238. The training of teachers in Austria is situated at university colleges of teacher education for the entire compulsory school sector. Teachers of the upper secondary level at general academic or vocational academic schools, however, have received their training at universities. Consequently, there are different service laws for these two groups of teachers with different payments respectively. Starting salaries for teachers are currently rather low with a significant increase in the last third of the professional career.

239. The compulsory schools, but also the AHS, currently know no middle management. Thus, the only way for teachers to make their career is to apply for the directorate. The vocational schools on the other hand, have established a middle management in form of team managers (FachbereichsleiterInnen) for a long time. While teachers in Austria were generally granted civil servant status until far in the 90ies, teachers are currently basically employees, however, with a very secure status. In addition, there are numerous teachers with no permanent post bound to apply every year for their position within the first five years.

240. While teachers at compulsory schools are obliged to participate in further training programmes every year, though only to a rather limited extent, there is no such obligation for teachers at the upper secondary level. Further training for teachers is only provided by the university colleges of teacher education.

The modifications of the teacher service law as well as the separated teacher training are currently two of the most important and most disputed reform projects.

#### 6.1.1 Overall Conception of the Teacher Appraisal

##### *Central Aspects of Teacher Appraisal*

241. Formally, there are three forms of “teacher appraisal”:

242. (a) The headmaster/mistress as superior carries out the performance assessment. The school management (headmaster/mistress) is authorised to effect performance statements/assessments of teachers when necessary. In practice, this happens rather seldom and usually has no consequences. In the positive case, extraordinary performance evaluations (also based on sitting in on classes) by the school management formerly were necessary in order to gain civil service status or nowadays to be able to take certain career steps, for example to apply for a headmaster/mistress position.

243. In a legal aspect, headmasters/mistresses have the task to control the quality of instruction in the sense of personnel and quality development, also by sitting in classes. They are supposed to acquire the respective competences in the obligatory school management trainings. However,

headmasters/mistresses (especially of medium and large schools) sit in rather seldom due to scarce time because of their manifold obligations. This principal stress situation is aggravated by the fact that there is - apart from vocational schools - no middle management (department heads, or similar) allowing school managers to delegate tasks.

244. If a headmaster/mistress has doubts about the instructional quality of a teacher he or she can be obliged to participate in further training programmes. In principal, headmasters/mistresses are responsible for the personnel development but they have no autonomy in these matters. The school management can propose a distinction because of extraordinary achievements for certain teachers. The distinction will be awarded by the school administration.

245. (b) In especially problematic cases (like severe complaints by parents) an inspector is sent to the school to participate in the evaluation of the teacher.

246. (c) It is the teacher's task to evaluate his or her instruction by him or herself. There are no methods or procedures prescribed. These forms of teacher appraisal are voluntary und supported by tools of the quality development and management systems QIBB and QIS available – but they are not binding.

247. For the future, it is scheduled to give the teachers the feedback of their classes results in the educational standards tests (from 2012 on). This is supposed to be either an approval of the work or to induce modifications or further training programmes. However, the testing of educational standards only concerns a small number of teachers (s. 3.4).

248. In general, it can be stated that the evaluation of teacher work constitutes a desideratum within the Austrian school system. Only very scarcely are teachers forced to accept negative sanctions (like transfers, dismissals, requirements for further training programmes) because of underperformance. Public complaints about the near impossibility to enforce a transfer or a dismissal of problematic teachers are relatively common. In the public opinion, the profession of teacher is regarded as a privileged profession, protected from all kinds of evaluation and due consequences to the greatest possible extent. On the other hand, however, extraordinary performances by teachers, be it in connection to projects or singular initiatives<sup>26</sup>, very often go unappreciated.

#### *Objectives and Strategic Importance in the Overall Concept of Evaluation*

249. The traditional structure of schools is cellularly segmented. Teachers are used to facing their professional problems (above all in connection to creation of their classes) individually and without coordination with other teachers. This cellular organisation finds its expression in the autonomy-parity pattern. According to Lortie (1972; see also Altrichter/Posch 1999, 203f.), there are two informal norms that are characteristic for the profession: Nobody is allowed to interfere with the proceedings of a teacher (autonomy) and all teachers are supposed to be regarded as „equal“ (parity). Different qualifications and different efforts are supposed to be no issue.

250. This basic professional pattern is also the vantage point of the teachers' unions, traditionally with a strong influence within the Austrian school system. They have been successfully preventing the implementation of stronger forms of individual performance assessment and evaluation of teachers.

#### *Longitudinal Approaches*

251. Up to now, there are no longitudinal approaches towards teacher appraisal.

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<sup>26</sup> e.g. „Pädagogische Panther“: <http://www.lsr-stmk.gv.at/cms/beitrag/10090802/360986/>

### *Distribution of Responsibility between different Agencies*

252. In Austria, teachers of academic secondary schools and vocational schools possess a university degree. They are employed and paid directly by the federal state. Teachers at primary, elementary and polytechnic schools studied at a university college of teacher education (formerly Pädagogische Akademie). They do not possess a university degree and are employed by the provinces.

253. The ministry is the supreme school administration authority. Every one of the nine Austrian provinces has its own Landesschulrat (education authority), legally a federal institution but de facto promoting the interests of the respective provinces. Moreover, every one of the 99 political districts has its own Bezirksschulrat. The provinces have educational departments at the agencies at the provincial governments and consultants at the districts. Accordingly, the question of responsibility concerning all matters of teacher performance is rather complex.

254. The headmasters/mistresses as direct supervisors constitute the most important group in relation to teacher appraisal. In cases of massive complaints on the part of parents about single teachers, district or province school inspectors might take action but only in close cooperation with headmasters/mistresses.

### *Connection to other forms of Evaluation*

255. At present, there are virtually no connections to other forms of evaluation. Ideally, teacher evaluation is supposed to be included in self-evaluation of schools (see school assessment). For example, it is frequently recommended for teachers to get their classes evaluated by pupils. QIS and QIBB provide tools for this procedure. In fact, the significance of teacher appraisal at schools is rather low.

256. The strategy from 2012 on is supposed to change this unsatisfying situation. The assessment of the educational standards will be combined with a feedback towards the teachers and will therefore constitute an objective element in the teacher evaluation. However, teacher unions criticised beforehand that the teacher-specific evaluations could be used for the performance assessments.

## **6.1.2 Procedures/practice**

### *Performance Criteria and Reference Standards*

257. Commonly, the evaluation is based on more or less systematic observation of classes by school management or inspectors combined with discussions with concerned teachers - see 6.1.1.1

### *Dimensions of Teacher Appraisal*

258. At the centre of the teacher appraisal by school management and inspectors lie the relation towards pupils, quality of instruction, class management, professional knowledge and discipline. Other aspects (absolved further training programmes, responsibility outside classes) are also important (see TALIS 2008: fig. 5.6).

### *Methodical and Regional Aspects*

259. Essential are observations of the classes, discussions with the teachers as well as the registration of complaints and pleas by the parents. As these methods are in no way standardised, there are vast differences between regions and sites.

### **6.1.3 Competences**

#### *Qualification of Evaluators*

260. Evaluators are primarily headmasters/mistresses and inspectors. See 5.2.3 for their qualification

#### *Role of the School Management*

261. As already mentioned above, there are no standardised procedures. Differences according to region and site have to be assumed.

### **6.1.4 Utilisation of Outcomes**

#### *Connections to Approaches of teacher professionalization*

262. There is no information because of lacking standardised procedures.

## **6.2 IMPLEMENTATION**

### **6.2.1 Controversies and Concerns**

263. The most important concerns within the informed public are that assessments of instructional quality are effected too scarcely and too sporadically. On the other hand, teacher unions struggle against stricter forms of assessment.

## **6.3 POLITICAL INITIATIVES**

### **6.3.1 Initiatives for Improvement of Teacher Appraisal**

264. Currently, a new teacher service law is under discussion. However, up to now, there are no substantial proposals or information as to the implementation of teacher appraisal.

## 7 Student assessment<sup>27</sup>

### 7.1 CURRENT PRACTICE

#### 7.1.1 Overall Concepts of Student Assessment

265. In contrast to many other European countries, national testing is a relatively new phenomenon in Austria's education system (cf. 2.1). Until very recently, Austrian schools have not been subject to national testing or external evaluation. The educational standards tests beginning in school year 2011/12, aiming at providing a basis for monitoring and evaluating schools and the education system, have been created in addition to the traditional system of continuous assessment. Also the standardised, competence-oriented maturation examination, scheduled for school year 2013/14, will mean a thorough modification of the current practice.

266. Before discussing the newly introduced standards testing in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which are junctures in the Austrian school system, it is necessary to look at the traditional Austrian system of assessment at ISCED levels 1 and 2 on the basis of the following legal documents: Assessment Decree, School Education Act and School Organisation Act (see → Ref.; also cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

##### *Forms of Student Assessment*

267. At Volksschule/Grundschule (primary school, ISCED level 1) pupils are assessed by their teachers on the basis of continuous participation in classroom activities in all subjects of instruction. In general, assessments are focused on both written performance such as school tests (in grade 4) and other written exams such as texts or dictations and on special practical performance assessments, as well as oral exercises. This assessment and also the assessment of the pupils' behaviour are spread evenly over the evaluation period. However, pupils at Volksschule/primary school are exempt from oral examinations, and written exams are only held in year 4 (4-6 school tests in German and Mathematics each) (cf. Assessment Decree).

268. At ISCED levels 1 and 2 the school year is divided into two semesters. After the first semester pupils receive a half-term report ("Schulnachricht"), and at the end of the school year they receive an end-of-year report ("Jahreszeugnis"). This document shows the name and location of the school, the pupil's personal data and grades achieved in that particular year. The range of grades for the single subjects consists of five grades: 1=sehr gut (excellent), 2=gut (good), 3=befriedigend (satisfactory), 4=genügend (sufficient), 5=nicht genügend (insufficient). In addition, there are endorsements in the end-of-year report stating e.g. whether the pupil has failed or successfully completed the grade and is therefore entitled to move up to the next grade or not, or if the pupil may retake the class. In the first year the half-term report contains an overall assessment either with or without written comments. Half-term or end-of-year reports at higher grades consist of marks with or without verbal additions (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

269. All pupils in their pre-school year and in primary school years 1 and 2 are allowed to move up to the next year, regardless of how they are evaluated in the end-of-year report. Pupils in higher years of primary school are generally entitled to move on to the next higher grade unless they have been awarded a "5" in any compulsory subject. The final decision whether a pupil may move on to the next grade lies with the staff council. Pupils who are not entitled to move on to the next grade repeat the grade because primary school and special schools for children with special needs do not offer resit examinations (Wiederholungsprüfungen). Apart from special schools, pupils with special educational

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<sup>27</sup> Chapter six is based on the publication "National Testing of Pupils in Europe" (2009) - with kind permission from Barbara Eller

needs are sometimes also taught in integration classes where they are supported by assistant teachers or tutors. (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

270. Pupils must have successfully completed year four to be admitted to lower secondary school. Pupils wanting to enter an academic-track secondary school (AHS) must have “Excellent” (1) or “Good” (2) grades in German language, reading, writing and Mathematics, or they can be admitted upon the recommendation of the teaching staff of the primary school. If a pupil fails to meet these requirements, he or she may take an entrance examination. (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

271. At general secondary school, performance assessments are spread evenly over the evaluation period (one semester) before pupils are assigned to one of three streams in the subjects of German, Mathematics and English. The following forms of formative and summative performance assessment are commonly used: observation of classroom participation, oral assessments (examinations and exercises), written assessments (tests, dictations), practical performance assessments and graphical performance assessments. Consideration concerning evaluation is given to special-status pupils with language deficiencies.

272. In general secondary school, teachers are responsible for making unbiased and fair evaluations as to independent work, acquisition and application of the subject matter, homework, and behaviour. *Behaviour at school* is evaluated by the joint teaching staff (class council) in form of a separate mark and it is not part of a grade of any subject. The class teacher (Klassenvorstand) may propose one of the following marks: very satisfactory, satisfactory, little satisfactory, not satisfactory. (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

273. Teachers consider all achievements made by the individual pupils, with the most recent performance bearing the largest weight, when evaluating performance at the end of the school-year. The end-of-year report (in year 8 including also the final report) also contains the overall-assessment that the pupil passed with distinction or success – if the corresponding requirements in the School Education Act (“Schulunterrichtsgesetz”) have been met.

274. In academic secondary schools the same forms of performance assessment are used as in lower secondary schools and students are also assessed by their teachers using the same grades (1-5). Teachers are also required to inform students and parents adequately about the general evaluation policy they use for feedback and performance assessment.

275. In the school pilot project New Secondary School (“Neue Mittelschule”), teaching all pupils of one age group together (Gesamtschule bzw. Inklusive Schule) the gradings in the half-term and end-of-term report can be effected according to different curricula. The curriculum of the academic secondary school is used as a standard. If required by the parents, assessment can be effectuated according to the general secondary school curriculum. At the same time, pupils with special-pedagogic requirements in single subjects or in general can be instructed according to the curriculum of the special needs school.

276. At the same time, teachers at the New Secondary School (“Neuen Mittelschule”) are required to test and use more and more formative forms of performance assessment. Examples are: objective oriented performance assessment, self-observation and self-evaluation, pupils' portfolio etc.

277. After successfully completing the 4<sup>th</sup> year of general secondary school, pupils receive an end-of-year final report which is needed for admission to upper secondary schools, pre-vocational schools (Polytechnische Schule), medium-level technical and vocational schools (Berufsbildende Mittlere Schulen) as well as commercial schools (Handelsakademie, Handelsschule) and upper secondary technical or vocational colleges (Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen), academic secondary schools/upper level (years 9 to 12) or for further professional activities. At the end of the first four years (lower cycle) of academic secondary school, students only receive an end-of-year report but no final certificate because their 9-year compulsory schooling is not yet completed. Students either continue to attend further academic secondary school (years 9 to 12) or transfer to another higher school type.



278. Concerning the current, up to 2011, matriculation examination, see. 2.1.1 and 7.1.2.

#### *Longitudinal Approaches at Student Assessment*

279. In Austria, longitudinal approaches at student assessment are not known.

#### *Division of Responsibility between Different Agencies*

280. Currently, the responsibility for the matriculation exam rests with the teachers composing and evaluating the written examination and with the matriculation board taking the oral examinations. Cases of doubt are treated by both of them (for more information, see 7.1.2).

281. In September 2006 a new institution concerned with the increased requirements as to quality development and evaluation was founded: the BIFIE (Federal Institute for Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System / Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation & Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens; for detailed description of the BIFIE cf. chapter 3.1.6).

282. The Ministry for Education entrusted the BIFIE with the conduct of educational standards tests as well as with the development and implementation of the standardised, competence-oriented matriculation examination. While the coordination of the educational standards regarding contents and the realisation of the project lies with the centre for education monitoring and educational standards (BIFIE Salzburg), the centre for data-management and statistics (BIFIE Salzburg) organises the implementation of baseline-tests, the sampling procedure and the data collection and analysis. In every province, a regional coordinator is responsible for direct contact with individual schools and support of the BIFIE as to the coordination of the standards tests and the transmission of data. (cf. BIFIE, 2009).

283. Regarding the skR, the BIFIE is charged with the implementation from school year 2013/14 on and with the elaboration of the questions, in cooperation with universities and school practitioners. The administration and execution of the matriculation exam (see 7.1.2 for details) on site, consisting of guiding and evaluating of the pre-scientific work, evaluation of the texts or tasks, the written performance up to the oral exam, remains with the teachers or the examination boards at the schools.

## **7.1.2 Procedures**

#### *Combination of Summative and Formative Student Assessments*

284. The results of standards tests do not influence students' grades neither are they used as instruments of selection. These tests provide individual feedback for the students and can be seen as a formative assessment for learning. Teachers or schools are not assessed on the basis of standards test results either. For teachers, class results of standard tests provide a means of self-evaluation in order to recognise strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and encourage them to improve their diagnostic competences. Furthermore, the results might be used to compare different teachers and schools, but rankings are explicitly **not** included in the intended functions of standards tests. These tests primarily function as an instrument for self-evaluation to foster improvement and to help finding adequate remedial measures.

#### *Centralised National Examinations with Effects for the Students: Performance Criteria and Reference Standards*

285. Currently, the matriculation examination at the AHS looks like the following:

286. A significant feature is the choice between alternative examination forms depending on the respective subject. The extent of the main exam is reduced to three written tests and three oral

examinations by a preliminary examination in form of a specialised paper. One oral part of the main examination must relate to the subject chosen for the specialised paper. An additional question refers to this paper. If the candidate decides against a preliminary examination, there is the choice of the number of written and oral partial exams with at least one oral focus exam (“Schwerpunktprüfung”).

287. The specialised paper provides the possibility to get acquainted with preliminary forms of scientific work and to meet the higher education qualification in one single subject. Regarding the content, it is required to demonstrate advanced understanding and synopsis of different aspects based on the acquired general knowledge.

288. The structure of the examination subject into core and special areas, as well as the differentiation of advanced and interdisciplinary questions illustrate the complexity and interconnectedness of topics.

289. The individualisation of examination forms and the intensified presentation of knowledge as opposed to a mere „testing“ results in a shift towards a „conversation“ or „discussion“, often reducing the traditional teacher/student gradient by forcing the examiners to treat new subjects as well.

#### *The standardised, competence-oriented matriculation examination*

290. With the beginning of the school year 2013/14, the standardised, competence-oriented matriculation examination (skR) will become effective at the AHS<sup>28</sup>. This new matriculation exam will be standardised as well as competence-oriented. As from the school year 2014/15 on, the secondary level vocational schools (BHS) will implement a standardised, competence-oriented matriculation as well.

291. The skR aims at rendering the performances of pupils and students more comparable, guarantee transparency and the highest possible objectivity and raise the significance of final examinations. A special concern, pursued by this amendment of the school education act is the sustainable safeguarding of acquired competences.

292. The skR is based on a „three-pillar-model“, consisting of a mandatory „abschließende Arbeit“ (final paper) (at the AHS the so called „vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit“ (pre-scientific paper/VWA), at the BHS the „Diplomarbeit“ diploma project)), the written tests and oral exams. This new form of matriculation exam is constructed in modules. That means that pupils are allowed to take their oral exams in spite of negative performances in the first or second pillar. In case of a negative assessment in the pre-scientific paper or the written tests they have to be repeated in the respective field. The compensation of negative written tests by an oral exam is nevertheless possible.

293. In the second half of the next to last grade, the pupils, in accordance to their teachers, decide on one topic, the school administration has to approve in the second semester of the next to last grade. The students have free choice of their examiners. The VWA encompasses between 4500 and 6000 words and has to be handed in during the second semester of the final grade, the latest at the beginning of the written tests. Objectives and essential criteria for the VWA and its presentation are among others: individuality, illustration of causes and effects, working with sources and (pre) scientific methods, distinct conceptualisation, articulateness and communication skills etc.

294. The tasks for the written tests in the language of instruction (German, Slovene, Hungarian, Croatian), in Mathematics and in the foreign languages (English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Greek) are composed externally at the BIFIE. All other test subjects remain in the responsibility of the head teachers but they have to be formulated in a competence-oriented manner as well. In Mathematics, the tasks are supposed to take the different types of schools (i.e. academic vs. vocational) into consideration: mathematical „basic skills“ are the basis, supplemented by curriculum

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<sup>28</sup> This chapter is based on the article „Standardisierte, Kompetenzorientierte Reifprüfung“ – (Schulnews 2/2009, [http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/18636/schulnews\\_02.pdf](http://www.BMUKK.gv.at/medienpool/18636/schulnews_02.pdf))

items. The teachers correct and assess according to a given correction and assessment key. After that, the results are controlled and confirmed by the chairman/woman of the examination board.

295. The Federal Ministry for education, via the BIFIE, has charged university institutes and practitioners with the development of standardised, competence-oriented tasks. Thus, the subject didactic institutes receive a feedback and insight into school-reality in order to structure the training of future teachers accordingly. Numerous field tests and school pilot projects will be held until the introduction date of 2013/14.

296. Depending on the number of written exams, the students have to take two or three oral examinations. Like now, the teachers have to bring the „essential parts“ of the subjects to the students' knowledge. These are part of the curriculum and are composed by the team of specialist subject teachers of the respective school location. The examiner formulates questions of every subject area, one of which the candidate has to answer.

## **7.2 POLITICAL INITIATIVES**

### **7.2.1 Political Initiatives to Improve Efficiency of Students Assessments**

297. Currently, the implementation of educational standards and the skR are the two major system relevant projects, after long negotiations largely undisputed between the two governing parties. After a long period without major modifications, they represent comprehensive reforms with presently incalculable consequences for the Austrian education system. Accordingly, apart from these two projects, there are currently no further projects in the field of students assessments discussed on the political level.

### **7.2.2 Political Options from the Perspective of Different Groups of Stakeholders**

298. Teacher unions and school partners are kept informed on current developments. Moreover, the implementation of educational standards and the skR are currently politically largely undisputed. Only teachers unions have a moderately critical attitude towards these activities and demand, rather generally, more financial means for schools, more teachers, smaller classes etc.

299. It remains to be expected that the feedback of educational standards testing outcomes in 2012 will lead to some discussions as to „Ownership of Data“ and especially the parents representatives will come into action. The first reference person for the school results will be the school headmasters and headmistresses. It may be anticipated that the parents' representatives will demand complete insight into the feedback as well.

## 8 Other Types of Evaluation and Assessment

### 8.1 PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS

300. With the “centre for educational research and evaluation“, the BIFIE operates a special department for evaluation of pilot school projects, reform programmes and innovations in the educational system. The following chapter illustrates some of the most important evaluations of the last two decades:

- In the 1980s, Austria established school pilot projects concerning the common education of pupils with/without special needs in the regular school, rapidly increasing in number. In the beginning of the 90s, the „Zentrum für Schulentwicklung“ (ZSE, a predecessor of the current BIFIE) was charged with the evaluation of these pilot school projects and with assessing the possibilities of implementing these pilot projects into the regular school system, with all the necessary accompanying activities. The central element of this evaluation was a survey of the participating teachers. The questions were the following:
  - In how far does the common instruction succeed, regarding the parallel support of pupils with/without special needs ?
  - Which are the most important supporting and inhibiting conditions for a successful integration?
  - What supporting measures are necessary for a successful integration?
  - Which organisational models of common instruction are more, which are less successful in the sense of best possible support for all children?

The outcome of this evaluation survey was a report, raising considerable attention in 1993 (Specht 1993).

- Within the framework of the amendment of the School Organisation Act of 1993, the autonomy range of the schools was expanded, especially in connection to the design of the curriculum (see chapter 2.3.2). In 1995, the Ministry for Education charged the ZSE with the evaluation of the effects of school autonomy on the quality of schools and instruction. The evaluation survey encompasses large-scale surveys of headmasters/mistresses, teachers, parents and students. The central questions were:
  - To what extent do the schools use the freedom given by school autonomy?
  - Does the extended school autonomy give headmasters/mistresses and teachers the possibility to establish real innovations at their schools or are there only selective modifications?
  - What are the differences between students' and parents' perception of quality of those schools that use their freedom and those that do not?

In 1996/97 several reports about this survey were published (Bachmann et al 1996; Specht 1997).

- After the publishing of the international performance studies TIMSS 3 and PISA, the Austrian educational policy saw above all the necessity to improve instruction in Mathematics and natural sciences on a large scale and to open it up for innovative approaches. Therefore, the university at Klagenfurt established the development and support project IMST („Innovations in Mathematics, Science and Technology Teaching), aiming at the further development of the instructional quality in Mathematics, natural science and informatics (Krainer et al, 2002).

This project aiming at the initiation and support of innovation in the mathematical and scientific instruction has been evaluated by an international panel of experts (Messner et al, 2005), as well as by the centre of school development (Specht 2004). At the focus of

this evaluation was the question if and to what extent the project succeeds in supporting the readiness for innovation of teachers in the Austrian educational system.

- At present, the BIFIE- Graz is evaluating the large-scale school pilot project New Secondary School („Neue Mittelschule“ - see chapter 1.1.2). Based on different methodological approaches, they evaluate if and to what extent the NMS succeeds better than the traditional school system in
  - supporting the professional and extra professional competences of the students,
  - improving the educational chances of deprived pupils,
  - and in establishing innovative forms of instruction, performance assessment and school ambience.

As the political consensus about the New Secondary School began to establish itself before the publishing of evaluation outcomes, the focus of the evaluation shifted to the question as to which variants of the implementation of the NMS are working most successfully, regarding their objectives. Thus, the implementation process is guided in terms of best practice realisation.

- Finally, the BIFIE Graz evaluates the implementation of the educational standards in the Austrian educational system. In the focus of this evaluation, there are four questions:
  - How do practitioners at schools evaluate the usefulness of educational standards?
  - Do educational standards contribute to a substantial modification and improvement of the instruction?
  - How do teachers and the school management assess the accompanying and further training activities connected to educational standards?
  - How do teachers and school management evaluate the result feedback of the standard tests? Do the feedbacks contribute to the implementation of quality development activities for schools and instruction?

In connection to this evaluation, several surveys of headmasters/mistresses and teachers have been carried out during the phase of implementation.

### 8.1.1 Objectives

301. The objectives of analyses of programme evaluation can be twofold:

- One objective might be the testing of school pilot projects and innovations according to their applicability and to develop proposals for a best possible implementation. In this case, we are dealing with a more summative evaluation with formative elements. For example the evaluation of the pilot project concerning common instruction for pupils with/without special needs. The evaluation of the NMS also belongs to this type.
- A different objective might be the intention to give the people who are responsible for a certain programme feedback as to its strengths and weaknesses, thus contributing to the improvement or optimisation of a school pilot project or a certain innovation. In this case, the evaluation is of a primarily formative nature. Evaluation of the school autonomy and the IMST development project are examples of this type of evaluation. The evaluation of the implementation of educational standards has a primarily formative character, highlighting successes and shortcomings of the implementation approach in order to deduce proposals for optimisation.

### **8.1.2 Methodology**

302. In terms of methodology, programme evaluations use methods of field research, like interviewing target groups of a certain programme or an innovation.

303. This can be achieved by the use of quantitative (questionnaires, tests), as well as qualitative procedures (interviews, observational activities, analysis of documents). In the case of the NMS evaluation for example, a quasi-experimental design is applied, comparing learning performances of pupils at the NMS with those of conventional school forms, by means of performance and competence tests.

304. Strictly experimental test and control group designs with randomised samples, as they are stipulated from time to time, are scarcely applied. Here, the opinion prevails, that the reality of education at schools is so complex, that even „randomised control trials“ are not fit to illustrate them sufficiently.

### **8.1.3 Utilisation of Evaluation Outcomes**

305. The grade of utilisation of evaluations of programmes and innovations by their principal varies significantly. Empirically, there are three forms of utilisation of evaluation outcomes to be differentiated:

- Legitimation: the evaluation is used only to demonstrate externally that there has been an evaluation at all. Its contents remain basically unacknowledged. This type describes more or less the above mentioned evaluation of the school autonomy. Even though the outcomes have later been quoted in research, the principal (Federal Ministry) has not applied them in a summative nor in a formative sense (programme optimisation).
- Programme control: other evaluations are used intensively in the sense of programme control or programme optimisation. The evaluation of the implementation of educational standards, currently effected by the BIFIE Graz is an example. The outcomes of the single investigations are directly transferred to the institutions in charge of the programme, which use them as a means of improvement of the fine tuning of the implementation processes.
- Political counselling: some evaluations are directly incorporated into the political processes of implementation and further development of school pilot projects in the legislative procedures. For example, the assessments of the evaluation of the school pilot projects concerning the common instruction of children with/without special needs contributed significantly to the liable regulation of integrative instruction in the school organisation act. With regard to the evaluation of the New Secondary School (Neue Mittelschule), politicians always emphasise that its implementation into the regular school system will depend directly on the outcomes of the summative evaluations.

## **8.2 EVALUATION OF HEADMASTERS/MISTRESSES**

306. An explicit evaluation of the school management is not provided in the Austrian school system. Evaluations of the school management are a part of the assessment of schools, as illustrated in chapter five. Accordingly, evaluations of headmasters/mistresses are effected within the framework of the following approaches.

- *Self-evaluation of schools according to QIS or QIBB.* In connection to the self-evaluation of schools, self-assessments of the school management are of primary importance. In particular within the framework of the tools for self-evaluation, there are elements for assessing teachers and parents according to satisfaction with the school managements' efficiency.
- *External evaluation of schools by the school administration.* The external evaluation of schools by the school administration (see the descriptions in chapters 3.1.3, 4.1.1 and 5.2.3) comprises the observation of all relevant areas of school quality, explicitly the fields of school management, administration and personnel development. As a result of the school evaluation, the school administration can discuss target agreements with the school management.
- *Data feedback at schools, based on comprehensive tests of educational standards.* The feedback of the educational standard tests on school level can also be understood as a form of evaluation of the school management. They illustrate if and to what extent a headmaster/mistress effectuates leadership in the field of instructional development. Naturally, not all school specific results are to be accounted for by the school managements. However, these feedbacks highlight the extend of required activities on the part of the school management in the fields of personnel development, further training programmes and instructional developments.

### 8.3 EVALUATION OF REGIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIONS

307. In Austria, a systematic evaluation of the regional educational administration does not exist. Attempts at effecting such evaluations are subverted by the provinces. In the summer of 2010, for example, the Federal Minister for education postulated a systematic controlling of teaching positions in the general school system of the provinces. Such a controlling has been rejected by the politically accountable prime ministers of the provinces and thus postponed.

308. It is nevertheless conceivable, that an evaluation of the regional educational administrations will be indispensable in the long run. The annual testing of the educational standards with the beginning of 2012 provides a database on students' performances, allowing a comparison of the regions and provinces. Even though there is so far no talk of a comparison of the provinces, it remains assumable that the mere existence of available data will result in the stipulation and finally in the effectuation of these comparisons by interested agents. Thus, the efficiency of governance-structures in the provinces will become an item of evaluation and of the discussion about educational policy.

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## 10 Appendix 1: Depiction of the Austrian School-Governance System

### System of Austrian School Administration (simplified)

