

SELF-EVALUATION IN THE SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ASSURANCE IN SLOVENIA

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Abstract

The paper will try to situate self-evaluation in the system of quality assessment and assurance in Slovenia. The aim is not to situate it theoretically, but rather to present the various ways and developments of quality assessment in Slovenia with special attention to self-evaluation projects.

There are four types of evaluation in Slovenia, which intermingle:

- external evaluation,
- internal evaluation,
- system evaluation,
- knowledge evaluation.

Both external and internal evaluations can deal with the system and knowledge, and both system and knowledge evaluations can be external and internal.

Evaluation of institutions is carried out as internal (where the evaluator participates in the institution's activities either as a teacher, or a principal, or a student) and as external (where the evaluator is not directly involved in the institution's activities, e.g. school inspection).

External evaluation of the system is carried out by the Inspectorate for Education and Sport, whose task is to oversee the implementation of legislation, other regulations and acts governing the organisation, the targeted use of public finances and the carrying out of educational activities in preschool centres, primary schools, music schools, lower and secondary vocational schools, secondary technical and vocational schools, general education secondary schools, colleges, special needs education institutions, adult education institutions, residential centres for schoolchildren and students, and private education institutions which carry out public education programmes.

Evaluation of educational programmes or the curricula is carried out by the National Evaluation Council, whose task is to co-ordinate the monitoring and implementation of the new curricula, its elements and new features in the areas of preschool education, compulsory basic education and secondary education. Evaluation of the curricula is carried out through evaluation studies, which, as a rule, last two years and are either commissioned by the Ministry or selected by calls for tenders.

There are many public institutions in Slovenia which deal with the evaluation of educational programmes: the National Education Institute, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, and the National Examination Centre.

Knowledge evaluation is both external – by means of international studies, such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS; or by national examinations at the end of primary and secondary school –, and internal – by analysing overall school performance at the end of each school year and, of course, by assessment and testing of knowledge in class.

For the last fifteen years, Slovenia has seen the rise of self-evaluation initiatives. The Ministry of Education and Sport has encouraged and linked numerous institutions and projects whose aim is high quality of educational process in order to establish a system of quality assessment and assurance with emphasis on self-evaluation. Several projects were carried out or are still underway:

THE MIRROR PROJECT

was carried out by the National Education Institute in the period from 1996 to 2001. The schools involved in the project drew upon their own experience in trying to determine the areas which needed quality improvement, e.g. knowledge assessment, working habits and motivation of students, co-operation with parents, communication, school environment, teacher-student relationship, etc.

THE WISE EYE PROJECT

was the continuation of the Mirror Project and was set up within the Ministry of Education and Sport in school year 2001/2002. The model comprised six areas: achievement of curricular objectives, carrying out school lessons, pupils, teachers, co-operation between school and parents, management. Its results took form of a guidebook and a set of questionnaires for individual schools to use in their process of self-evaluation.

THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ASSURANCE PROJECT

was the continuation of the Wise Eye Project and started in 2003. Its aim was to adapt the questionnaires of the Wise Eye Project to the particular levels of the education system, i.e. preschool education, general secondary education and vocational and technical secondary education.

LEARNING SCHOOLS NETWORK

has been carried out by the National School for Leadership in Education since 1998. It aims to improve classroom practice, to encourage and maintain the process of self-improvement of schools, to develop collaborative ways of learning within and among schools and to share examples of good practice. The project is now part of the curricula of the National School for Leadership in Education. It forms networks around the following themes: learning and teaching, strategies for preventing violence, developing an effective school climate and civic education.

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

was carried out by the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training in the framework of the PHARE-MOCCA programme. Schools had to prepare their own plans of quality assurance based on four obligatory areas: management, school performance and results of the educational process, values and school atmosphere.

OFFERING HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION TO ADULTS

is a model developed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education on the basis of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Project and adapted to the field of adult education. The

model helps adult education institutions to evaluate and develop the quality of their work in the following areas: achieving curricular objectives, educational process, students, teachers, co-operation with the institution's environment, and management.

There are also several other quality projects managed by other institutions, such as THE QUALITY FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION PROJECT, developed by the Slovenian Institute of Quality and Metrology; and quality awards, such as APPLES OF QUALITY, national awards for the best mobility projects within the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme, and EUROPEAN QUALITY LABEL, for projects within the framework of the EU Socrates programme. The quality of higher education is monitored by the National Commission for Quality of Higher Education.

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ASSURANCE IN PRESCHOOL CENTRES, PRIMARY, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS

was formed in 2003. One of its main tasks is to set recommendations for educational institutions for quality assessment and assurance.

The National Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance together with the Ministry of Education and Sport put out the Call for Tenders for the Co-financing of Networks of Educational Institutions for Quality Assessment and Development in January 2006. The selected networks are co-financed by the Ministry and the European Social Fund. They started their projects in April 2006 and will have finished them by August 2007.

The aim is to encourage educational institutions to form networks, test and develop various instruments and methods of self-evaluation, thus incorporating self-evaluation in their practice. Projects should help disseminate examples of good practice and stimulate co-operation with different stakeholders. Members of networks should form quality teams who choose and develop instruments for quality assessment, analyse the situation, design action plans of measures to improve quality in their chosen areas and invite other teachers, students, parents, local community and other stakeholders to participate in their projects. The next step after analysing the results of measures should be to prepare plans of quality improvement and development for their future work.

The expert commission chose five networks: one on the level of preschool education, two on the level of basic education, one on the level of general secondary education and one on the level of vocational and technical secondary education. The preschool network includes fifteen preschool centres with 2.441 children and 400 educational and management staff. One of the basic networks involves seven primary schools with 2.152 pupils and 101 educational and management staff. The other network on the basic education level also comprises seven primary schools with 2.800 pupils and 400 educational and management staff. The general secondary network includes nine general secondary schools with 2.250 students and 160 educational and management staff. The vocational network involves twelve vocational and technical secondary schools with 3.000 students and 360 educational and management staff.

What were the main criteria for the selection of networks? The expert commission assessed if the proposals presented viable objectives, had added value, were practicable and effective. Special attention was paid to the chosen fields of self-evaluation, regional inclusion, and references of the tenderers.

What are the fields that institutions have chosen for self-evaluation? They include the educational process and achievement of curricular objectives, e.g. how the lessons are carried out (methods of teaching, active learning strategies, organisation of the educational process, timetable, etc.), literacy improvement (various kinds of literacy), fostering values, such as tolerance, solidarity, responsibility, active citizenship, a healthy life style, etc., optional contents on the level of general secondary education (which are an important part of the *gimnazija* curriculum). Another field comprises students, teachers, parents, and the local community: e.g., co-operation with parents and local community, interaction in the classroom, additional help for students with special needs, monitoring enrolment and following up graduates, the individual's autonomy, investment in human resources, career development and job satisfaction. An important field is also leadership and management of educational institutions, which involves strategies of leadership, the principal's portfolio, communication between the management and the staff.

The projects started in mid-April and the networks have submitted two interim reports by now, which show the phases of projects already finished. All networks nominated quality teams and presented their projects to parents, local communities, social partners and other stakeholders. The teams defined the fields of self-evaluation, prepared questionnaires, carried out surveys, interpreted the data, and so analysed the present situation. The next step was to define the aspects which needed improvement, chose instruments and methods of further work, discussed quality indicators and designed action plans. Action plans included objectives, activities, their time frames, and monitoring and evaluation of individual phases. Several materials were prepared for work with students; seminars for in-service teacher training were selected; leaflets for parents and other stakeholders were written; several web sites were designed to present the projects and their progress. Conferences and workshops were organised, where the interested parties could discuss the issues and possible solutions, share experience and examples of good practice, exchange information and opinions.

The Ministry of Education and Sport and the National Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance expect that the final results of the projects will help set up the quality indicators both on the national and institutional levels, create bases for legislative changes (e.g. the introduction of quality teams in preschool centres and primary and general secondary schools, while they have already been introduced in vocational and technical secondary schools) and for the anticipated implementation of self-evaluation as an integral part of the curricula in Slovenian preschool centres and schools.