

OECD REVIEW ON EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION: ROMANIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

Student assessment: Putting learning at the centre

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

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

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

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

Teaching appraisal: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers' professional development

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

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

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

School evaluation: Moving from compliance to improvement

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

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

System evaluation: Using information for system improvement

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

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

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