Students assessment

The assessment of students has significantly developed during the past decade. The scope of various assessment techniques which, in many cases, serve educational management purposes, has expanded. Assessments have become more professional and reputable among teachers. Also, important innovations have occurred in this field.

The Public Education Act introduced in 2011 specifies that the performance of students has to be evaluated regularly by using marks and students and parents have to be informed about these on a regular basis.

Diagnostic assessment is primarily used for new entrant classes and for grouping students into classes according to their abilities (e.g. in Foreign Language or Mathematics classes). In these cases, the purpose is to increase efficiency by not having large knowledge differences within a group.

Both formative and summative assessment are used regularly in schools. In terms of function, however, these forms of assessment are not always separated from each other and sometimes the difference between the two becomes blurred especially for students and their parents.

Marks and grades used to evaluate student performance are as follows: excellent (5), good (4), satisfactory (3), pass (2) and fail (1). Behaviour and effort/diligence are evaluated on a four-grade scale: exemplary (5), good (4), could do better (3) and poor (2).

Marks are recorded in the attendance book of the class, which includes students’ basic data. The grades are recorded in each student’s report book as well which primarily aims at providing information for parents. Most schools use electronic attendance and report books where teachers, parents and students can access their relevant profiles (under strict data protection conditions). Teachers tend to evaluate all students at least once every one or two months in every subject and inform parents about the grades earned through an electronic reporting system. Parents certify that they have seen the school marks/assessment.

In case of formative assessment, in addition to giving grades, some schools also provide percentage and a written description of student performance. The assessment tools/methods applied are described in the pedagogical programme of the school.

The most frequently used tools of formative assessment are short oral tests, short written tests (taking 5-20 minutes) and the checking of written homework. The most widely used tools of summative assessment are end of topic tests (after completing a larger thematic unit) and mid-term or end-term assessment. These are usually made on the basis of the marks earned during formative and summative assessments throughout the school year. In addition, not so commonly used tools of summative assessment include the written summary of the topic of several lessons, written project works / oral presentations based on individual observations, experiments and data collection. A tool more rarely used is the annual or more frequent internal examination (especially in private schools). A small part of general secondary schools conducts internal examinations called ‘small secondary school-leaving examination’ at
the end of grade 10 and ‘mock secondary school-leaving examination’ at the end of grade 11. The latter simulates the real examination to be taken at the end of grade 12.

National Assessment of Basic Competences

The first National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) was carried out in 2001 with the primary aim of assessing the effectiveness of schools (source: general description about the national assessment of basic competences[1]). During the past few years, the assessment system has developed in such a way that now it informs students, parents and teachers about students’ individual development. The NABC is an annual assessment system which covers almost all students in grades 6, 8 and 10. It has been implemented since 2007 following the same procedures as determined by the Public Education Act and a Ministerial Decree (2011 CXC. Law on National Public Education and Law 20/2012. (VIII. 31.) of the Ministry of Human Capacities on the Operation of Educational Institutions and the Use of Names in Public Educational Institutions). [2] During the assessment, students complete mathematics and reading comprehension tests at the end of every school year in the last week of May. The tests are organised in four 45-minute sessions. Tests do not assess the extent to which students have acquired the knowledge prescribed by the syllabus of the given grade. Rather, they examine the extent to which students can apply their knowledge to solve real life problems.

Assessment results [3] are used for preparing a National Report as well as reports at the level of the maintainer, the institution, the school site and the individual student.

The Student Report presents the student’s achievement on the test, the results broken down into tasks and the results compared to the national, the school and the class average. As a unique assessment ID is required to access the Student Report, such reports may only be viewed by the students, their parents and the school. The National Assessment of Basic Competences has already contributed to the improvement of diagnostic assessment in schools: the teaching staff of schools often analyse the results of their school together and a large number of teachers has received further training in this field.

Progression of students

The general rules applying to the progress of students are determined in the 2011 Act on Public Education [4].

At the end of each term and school year, the evaluation is expressed in the form of grades in every subject worked out on the basis of the interim grades given during the year and on the basis of student’s activity throughout the term/year. From the two grades, the one assigned at the end of the first term is for information but the year-end grade is a prerequisite for progressing to the next grade. Both the student and the parent have to be informed about the end-of-term and end-of-year grades. At the end of the first term, this information is provided by way of a report booklet while at the end of the year it is provided by way of the annual school report booklet. The annual school report booklet is a public document.

It is a basic principle (set out in the Act on Public Education) that grades cannot be applied as a disciplinary instrument; they must reflect the student’s actual knowledge and performance. Schools and teachers increasingly comply with this criterion. The grades - like the marks during the course of the school year - appear in the form of a five-degree scale (excellent - 5, good - 4, medium - 3, satisfactory (pass) - 2 and unsatisfactory (fail) - 1.). Behaviour and diligence are rated on the basis of a four-degree scale: exemplary - 5, good - 4, varying - 3 and poor/negligent - 2. The marks are given by the teacher and he/she makes a proposal for the year-end grade. Decision on the progress of the student to the next grade is made by the teaching staff on the basis of their review of the year-end grades.

A student may progress to the next grade if she/he manages to fulfil the prescribed study requirements by the end of the school year, i.e. if - on the basis of his or her performance and marks
during the year or his/her performance at the school’s examination - he or she receives at least a satisfactory (2) grade. Decision on the necessity of repeating a given grade is to be made at the end of the school year by the teaching staff. Pursuant to law, parents can also request the re-take of the school year. The grade may have to be repeated if the student was given an unsatisfactory (1) grade in any subject. Before the beginning of the next school year, however, the student may take a re-take examination, theoretically irrespective of the number of subjects in need of improvement. In practice, however, this means one, two or rarely three subjects. The remedial exam can be taken at the school or before an independent examination board. The latter must be applied for at school, but it is up to the Educational Authority to organize the exam.

**Repeating a grade cannot be denied from the student until the end of the mandatory schooling age.** If the student achieves a minimum of a satisfactory (2) grade in every subject at the re-take examination, she or he may progress to the next grade. A student must repeat the grade on a mandatory basis also when the total number of classes missed with or without justification exceeds the statutory maximum number and if the teaching staff did not permit the student to take the grading examination.

**As long as the student does not pass the mandatory schooling age, grade repetition cannot entail expelling the student from the school.** Indeed, if the student repeats the same grade for the second or third etc. time, the school must provide individual activity for the student to enable him/her to catch up. A general secondary school may terminate the relationship with the student if the student fails to complete the given grade for the third time (by which time he or she has probably reached the end of the mandatory schooling age).

A parent representing a minor student may initiate a procedure against the certification of conduct, diligence, and studies if the certification is not in accordance with the local curriculum applied by the school, or if the certification procedure is in conflict with the law or the student status provisions. If the parent seeks legal remedy against the certification of the studies, the student may, in accordance with the procedure prescribed by law, takes and exam before an independent examination board, which shall be organized by the county office of the county seat (20/2012. (VIII. 31.) Ministry of Human Capacities on the operation of public institutions and on the use of public education institutions).

The successful completion of secondary-school studies provides the student with a secondary-level qualification. However, students may proceed to higher education only if they pass the secondary school-leaving examination, which follows secondary-level education itself. The precondition of participating in the secondary school-leaving exam is obtaining the final report of secondary education—that is, acquiring at least a satisfactory grade from all subjects. Besides, this final report has to contain a statement that the student had successfully completed a 50-hour community service.

From certain subjects, it is possible to take an ‘early school-leaving examination’. From 2014, this possibility is restricted only to foreign languages and information technology. (Previously, it had been possible to take this early exam from almost all subjects.) Taking this early exam is relatively popular among students. It happens quite often that students take the early secondary school-leaving exam from a given subject at the end of year 11 or even year 10. In some cases, students decide on taking this exam at the end of the year when they finish their studies from the given subject.

The exam has to be taken before an exam committee in Hungarian, in the language of an ethnic minority or in a foreign language. As described in the regulations concerning secondary school-leaving examinations, students may view their written exams before the oral part and they can attach their individual evaluation to the official assessment.

**As a closing examination, the secondary school-leaving exam examines general knowledge.** This is a state examination which is to be organised in accordance with the standardised requirements across all secondary schools in Hungary. In 2005, the dual-level Upper Secondary School leaving examination system was introduced. The two-level maturity exam means that you can take the intermediate and advanced level exams for each subject. Intermediate level is sufficient to the issuance of the Upper Secondary School leaving examination Certificate. The advanced examination is intended to
replace the previous ‘entrance examination’ in higher education institutions where this is required.

At least five subjects must be taken at the secondary school leaving examination. These include:

1.) Hungarian Language and Literature,
2.) History,
3.) Mathematics,
4.) Foreign Language – for students participating in minority education, it is mother tongue language and literature,
5.) One subject of the student’s choice.

In addition to compulsory subjects and compulsory electives, secondary school-leaving exams may be taken from other subjects as well. The exam consists of several parts: oral, written and – in case of certain subjects – a practical part. The exam periods are in May-June and in September-October.

Students can switch between general secondary schools relatively freely, which often takes place after the family’s moving to a different location. It may also take place for other reasons at the parent’s request. A student is entitled to change programmes even without repeating the grade if this is allowed by the differences between the content of the two programmes. This is always decided by the principal of the recipient school and he/she determines the subjects, if any, in which the student has to pass an equivalency exam.

When the student is suspected to be lacking some particular skill - e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia –, various capabilities of the student may be examined by a panel designated for this purpose. The parent’s approval is necessary for this examination. Frequently, the decision taken by the panel results in exemption from fulfilling the minimum requirements of certain subjects (e.g. foreign language or mathematics). Such cases are more and more common. This does not obstruct the student’s progress to the next grade. By law, students are also permitted to complete more than one grade in a given school year with the principal’s permit. In such cases, however, he or she must pass a grading examination at the end of the year. This takes place in the case of particularly talented private students but it occurs very rarely.

**Certification**

**At the end of each grade, students are provided with year-end school reports (certificates).** The grades entered in the year-end school reports are based on the student’s performance during the school year, his or her marks received during the course of formative and summative assessments/evaluations and, on rare occasions, on the ratings achieved at the voluntary examinations organised by the school. Accordingly, the year-end school report is not preceded by a specific examination. Private students are an exception to this rule (they account for less than 1 percent of all students) who give an account about their knowledge at the end of the year in the form of a grading examination. These private students take the exam along with students obliged to pass a re-take examination. Students who have to pass a re-take examination from a given subject had previously received an unsatisfactory (1) grade. In addition, those students who missed more classes than the prescribed maximum limit (30 % of all classes from a given subject) also have to pass a re-take exam.

The year-end school report is a public document the contents of which must be accepted until the contrary is proven. The year-end school report must be provided in Hungarian or, if teaching takes place in two languages, it must be provided in both languages. The school cannot refuse to issue a year-end school report on the basis of any excuse. The year-end school report contains the student’s name, identification data, grade, the titles of the subjects, the grade in a textual and in a numerical form, the field of comments, the date, the signature of the principal and the form master as well as the seal of the school.

The production and distribution of the secondary school-leaving exam certificate requires the permit of the minister responsible for education. In addition to the examinee’s data, the secondary
school-leaving exam certificate contains the titles and levels of the examination subjects, the language of the examination and the result of the examination in terms of grades in textual and percentage form as well as the authenticating signatures and clauses. The secondary school-leaving examination certificate is issued by the examination board. The successful passing of the secondary school-leaving examination is a prerequisite for obtaining the certificate. The student or the parents are entitled to submit their appeal against the decision of the examination board to the relevant government office within 5 days (referring to a violation of the pertaining legislation). The government office has three days available to make a decision on the appeal.

If the student obtains the secondary school-leaving exam certificate, the document provides access to admission to higher education institutions or vocational training. Also, some students may decide on taking up employment. The secondary school-leaving examination certificate entitles the student to enrol in any higher education institution if other admission requirements defined by that institution are also met.

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