Students assessment

The culture of evaluating students has improved significantly over the past decade. The spectrum of measuring student performance has grown wider and its professionalism has improved. Also, these measurements, on several occasions, have served important educational policy purposes. Teachers attribute more and more importance to these measurements in their pedagogical work. In addition, quite a number of innovations have been introduced in the field. One such example is the Vocational School Development Programme completed with the involvement of 160 vocational schools between 2003 and 2009. This programme was aiming at improving teachers’ practices regarding evaluation and measurement techniques.

The 2011 Act on Public Education declares that the performance of students must be evaluated on a regular basis by the means of grades. It declares parents’ rights to be provided with regular, detailed and meaningful information on the development, behaviour and progress of their children. On this basis, the majority of teachers uses formative evaluation techniques on a regular basis (almost in every class) in order to motivate students.

Diagnostic evaluation is frequently applied in vocational schools in comparison with other secondary programmes. The main reason for this is the fact that students coming to vocational schools perform the lowest in basic schools. Most of these students are facing difficulties in literacy and numerical skills; therefore, an accurate knowledge of their development needs is a key priority. During the Vocational School Development Programme, quite a number of teachers have learnt the methodology of diagnostic evaluation from the participating 160 institutions.

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. The same five-scale evaluation system is used in case of both types of assessment.

Marks and grades used to evaluate students’ performance are as follows: excellent (5), good (4), satisfactory (3), pass (2) and fail (1). Marks are recorded in the attendance book of the class, which includes students’ basic data. Grades are recorded in each student’s report book as well which primarily aims at providing information to 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 percentages or written descriptions about student performance. The assessment tools/methods applied are
described in the pedagogical programme of the school. It is the right of every teacher to use this type of assessment according to current needs.

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 and end-term assessments. 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 works / oral presentations based on individual observations, experiments and data collection.

The so called ‘level exam’ is a widespread form of formative assessment in vocational education. This type of exam is only organised in vocational secondary schools and in vocational training schools. Besides, in case of these exams, it is the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which is responsible for developing the central vocational program and the exam requirements. In such vocational programs, it is obligatory to organise the level exams. These exams are organised by the Chamber in close cooperation with the school. The database of the exams is also maintained by the Chamber. Previously, level exams had been organised approximately halfway through vocational education. Most recently, however, these exams have been organised in the second term of grade 9 (between February and April). Passing the level exam is a prerequisite for entering practical training with a student contract at a given company.

Behaviour and effort/diligence are evaluated on a four-grade scale: exemplary (5), good (4), could do better (3) and poor (2).

**Competence assessment**

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 [1] about the national assessment of basic competences). The assessment system has developed during the past few years in 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 under the same order of procedure as prescribed by the Act on Public Education and a Ministerial Decree. During the assessment, students complete mathematics and reading comprehension tests at the end of every school year in the last week of May 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, the extent to which students can apply their knowledge to solve real life problems.

Assessment results [2] 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, results broken down into tasks and 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 [3].

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 the 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 the mark and the grade cannot be applied as a disciplinary instrument; they must reflect students’ 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 scale of five grades (excellent - 5, good - 4, medium - 3, satisfactory (pass) - 2 and unsatisfactory (fail) - 1.). Behaviour and diligence are rated on a scale of four grades: exemplary - 5, good - 4, varying - 3 and poor/negligent - 2. The marks are given by the teacher and he or she makes a proposal for the year-end grade. The final decision is made by the teaching staff. Decision on the progress of the student to the next grade is also 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 he/she 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 retake 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. A re-take examination may be taken and passed either at the school or before an independent examination board. The latter must be requested at the school but the organisation of such an examination is the task of the Educational Authority, which appoints independent teachers specialising in the subject concerned. This solution is rarely opted for; typically, only in cases when there is some conflict or distrust between the student or the parents and the teacher concerned.

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 in the re-take examination, he or she 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 the teaching staff does not permit the student to take the grading examination. If the student misses more than 20% of the practical training, he/she has to repeat the year automatically (even if the reason for the absence, certified by a doctor, is a medical problem).

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 or her to catch up. Repeating a year is always free of charge in grades 9 and 10. From grade 11, repeating the year is free of charge only on one occasion. There is a tuition fee in case of grade repetition for the second time if the reason behind is the fact that the student did not fulfil the necessary educational requirements. (In case the reason of repetition is a severe illness, it is always free of charge.) In practice, however, repeating a grade for a tuition fee in state-funded secondary education never happens.

A school may terminate the relationship with the student if the student has failed 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).

The successful completion of grade 12 in a vocational secondary school provides the student with a secondary-level qualification. However, students may proceed to higher education or post-secondary 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 examination 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. As described in the exam regulations concerning secondary school-leaving exams, 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 examination examines general knowledge/education. This is a state examination that is to be organised in accordance with the standardised requirements across all secondary schools in the country.

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.) A complex subject related to the pertaining vocational training sector

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 who started their studies in 2016 in a given vocational secondary school will take a vocational final exam from 2020. In other words, the new training structure will require an additional exam besides the secondary school-leaving examination. The vocational final exam will be
Based on the regulations of the National Qualifications Register.

**After successfully completing grade 11 in vocational training schools, students take a complex vocational exam.** This guarantees that students finish their secondary-level studies with a vocational qualification recognised in the whole country. The vocational and exam requirements contain the preconditions, the required parts and the contents of vocational exams. This exam is also a state exam which may be taken before an independent exam committee consisting of experts. During the exam, pertaining regulations have to be followed. The exam committee of the vocational exam uses a seal containing the coat of arms of Hungary. The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry or the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture delegates a member into this exam committee who is most frequently the president of this body. The list of experts as possible exam committee presidents is maintained by the ministry responsible for vocational training. The general rules and procedures of vocational exams are regulated by a ministerial decree. The exam parts of the compulsory modules consist of exam assignments and the pertaining written, oral, interactive and practical exam activities. On the basis of previously passed exams, students may be exempted from certain parts, subjects or modules of the complex vocational exam.

Previously, changing the vocational program and thus the qualification to be obtained was relatively frequent in grades 9 and 10. However, as a result of the new training structures of vocational training schools and vocational secondary schools (introduced in 2013 and in 2016), **practical training related to the given vocation already starts in grade 9.** Since the maximum proportion of missed classes cannot exceed 20% of the overall number of classes (even if the absence is certified), from November in every year, possibilities to change the type of vocational training within legal bounds are limited. Under special circumstances, the teaching staff of the given vocational training school may decide about the student’s progress. These circumstances include the following:

1. the student’s absence has always been certified,
2. on the basis of the student’s previous performance, it can be foreseen that the delay will be brought in by the beginning of the next school year,
3. the student is able to fulfil the determined requirements related to practical training.

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 with the parent’s approval. Frequently, the decision taken by the panel results in exemption from the obligation to fulfil the minimum requirements of certain subjects (e.g. foreign language or mathematics). Such cases are more and more common.

**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 and his or her marks received in the course of formative and summative evaluations. The issuance of the certificate is preceded by an exam only in the following cases:

1. in case of private students (they account for less than 1 percent of all students),
2. in case of students who received an unsatisfactory (1) grade form a given subject at the end of the year,
3. in case of students who missed more than 30% of the overall number of classes.

These students have to give an account of their knowledge in the form of a complex exam covering the subject material of the given grade.
**The year-end school report is a public document** the contents of which must be accepted until the contrary is proven. The form of this report is approved by the minister in charge of education. The production and distribution of this document also requires the minister’s permit. 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.

A student may receive a certificate verifying a given vocational qualification if he/she has successfully completed the vocational and exam requirements. Students who have only partially completed these requirements may receive a partial qualification. The certificate verifying a vocational qualification is also a public document; its production and distribution requires the minister’s permit. The certificate is issued by the vocational exam committee. This document entitles the owner to find employment or pursue activities related to the given vocation.

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