

White Book

Quality Development and Quality Assurance in the Austrian System of Education

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Foreword

*When the winds of change blow,
some build walls,
and some build windmills.*

The growing significance of high-quality education in our knowledge-based society is an undisputed fact. More than ever, the conditions governing education and training are characterised by fast-paced change and increasing complexity. Steering a highly dynamic system such as education is a new challenge for educational policy-makers, the school administration and teacher training alike.

In line with international developments, Austria, too, is experiencing a shift of priorities from central input control to process and, in particular, output control. As a logical consequence, the self-concept at the steering levels is undergoing fundamental change as well. Ready-made concepts that prescribe every detail give way to a new governance philosophy that focuses on framework requirements, agreements on objectives, participation and transparency.

The present white book captures this trend and was drafted in a cooperative effort by renowned researchers and school administration experts. In a process of several years, issues and findings on quality development and quality assurance were raised and debated in numerous think tank sessions. A comprehensive publication by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education on quality development and quality assessment in the Austrian system of education *Qualitätsentwicklung und Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen (Band 17 der Reihe BILDUNGS-FORSCHUNG des BMBWK)* was the immediate result, and the basis for this white book. This white book ventures on new ground, both in its substance as well as in terms of the process of public opinion formation. It is designed to provide condensed information on the current state of reflection in the field of quality development and quality assurance in the Austrian system of education and to stimulate as wide as possible a debate on how to ensure continuity whilst advancing modernisation in this field.



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Table of contents

Foreword

Quality development and quality assurance at a glance 3

Responding to social change – Increasing demand for broad-based education – Redressing ill-directed developments and shortcomings – What is quality? – A system for quality development and assurance – Elements of a quality culture – Impact of a quality culture

Quality in teaching 11

Performance assessment – Innovative forms of performance assessment – Feedback for teachers

Quality development and quality assurance at school level 15

The school programme as a quality base – School programme and evaluation – Human resources development – Feedback for school management – School surveys – Absence of a middle management – Schools opening up

Quality development and quality assurance at the higher levels 23

The regional level – Quality management at the federal level – System monitoring – Benchmarking – Further development of the educational statistics – In-depth surveys – External performance assessment – The European context

The changing educational profession 33

A changed self-image of teachers – Changed role of school management – Changes at the school inspection and school administration levels – Quality in initial and in-service training

The quality environment 40

Support from the school psychological service – The school ombudsman – A quality framework: Curricula – Teaching aids – Legal framework – Financial framework – Institutionalisation of central functions

Implementing strategies..... 45

Quality development and quality assurance at a glance

Motives – Measures – Impact

Responding to social change

For a long time, the question as to school quality could be answered by reference to state-imposed requirements: quality was what the state prescribed under the umbrella of its institutional legitimation. In times of ever-accelerating social change, this description, which applies to virtually all public institutions from government administration to public health-care, has long lost its pertinence. A debate has therefore been launched in recent years in Austria, as in most industrialised nations, about what exactly school quality is and how it can be developed and assured.

Three megatrends characterise the changes society is currently facing:

- *Individualisation*, a long-established process of individuals detaching themselves from what is imposed on them by local, societal and religious structures and becoming independent human beings who act self-reliantly and shape their lives.
- *Informationalisation* towards a learning and knowledge-based society as communication technologies progress and dominate our lives. New knowledge leads to a permanent reconstitution of society. Individuals must engage in life-long learning to be able to participate.
- *Internationalisation*, controversially discussed under the heading of “globalisation“. Local events and conditions are increasingly perceived and acted upon under the awareness of a world-wide context. This trend manifests itself in the global migration of people, as much as in professional and personal mobility (a form of individual migration) in a quest to realise personal potentials more fully.

These trends have been the subject of public and internal debate and reform in recent years. They affect schools in several ways.

A response would be easier, if these changes affected an entire country such as Austria in a uniform way: they would be taken stock of, the tasks and structures of the school system would be adjusted and imposed on a national scale for everybody, down to the details of educational practice, following the time-proven model of school development.

However, social change is highly divergent at the local and regional levels, necessitating the *autonomisation* of schools. The schools themselves are called upon to carry out, within a common frame, adjustments and changes which make sense at a given location. This is the only viable response to the complexities of modern-day society.

Autonomy gives the individual school more scope for independent decision-making. However, this must be paired with accountability for these decisions. In stark contrast to the school reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, this governance philosophy has gradually gained ground in Austria since the 1990s. The catchwords accompanying this development are deregulation, decentralisation, autonomy, a careful orientation towards the market principles of supply and demand, and considerate privatisation.

With greater autonomy, the local schools as well as other public institutions must assess their activities also by *commercial criteria*. Economy is less important in central structures as every detail is subject to authorisation. Autonomous structures, however, receive allocated budgets which they are free to spend and for which they are accountable in terms of the results achieved. The benefit of educational measures is becoming a subject of debate: Are results achieved at reasonable cost?

In the light of economisation, which is one of the corollaries of ever tightening state budgets, the quality issue poses itself from a new angle. “The more the better”, a credo of earlier school reforms, is now being replaced by “What can be best achieved with what resources?”

Increasing demand for broad-based education

While money and resources are limited, the megatrends mentioned above generate more demand for education and educational degrees and certificates, as manifested by a number of developments: a higher participation rate in education altogether, a progressing shift of pupil flows from secondary general to secondary academic schools, persisting demand for medium and higher-level technical/vocational schools, integration of pupils with most diverse abilities at secondary general schools (children from ethnic minorities, with different talents and different disabilities, behavioural problems).

Increasingly, the school system must supply high-quality education to all social strata on as broad a basis as possible. At the same time, universalisation breeds insecurity about a loss in quality. Not only the public at large are disconcerted, but teachers as well. This is why schooling must subject itself to an assessment in the form of quality evaluation so that relevant results can be documented.

Redressing ill-directed developments and shortcomings

Efforts at quality development and quality assurance at schools have been inspired by several motives: an interest to remedy ill-directed developments and systemic deficiencies; concerns about the school system's capacity to perform; the need to steer its future development in an autonomous setting; and the coordination of the many scattered school development initiatives.

Expert surveys have shed further light on those fields where action is called for, identifying the absence of an overarching educational plan, insufficient control of the system, teachers lacking professionalism when it comes to didactics, methodology and teamwork, as well as little backing for change processes.

A number of isolated observations have fuelled concerns about the impact of growing school heterogeneity: the poor performance of Austrian pupils at secondary level II in international comparative surveys in the mathematics/science area, a growing rate of pupils with behavioural problems, and doubts repeatedly voiced by the business community about the qualifications of school leavers.

And yet, the growing importance of quality development and assurance is less a response to deficiencies, but primarily grounded in the hope for a better control instrument that allows coping with change.

Last but not least, there is an intention to bring the many fragmented initiatives on school development which have emerged in recent years under a common frame and to create a sound common basis for further development. An overall strategy and the legal requirements are still missing.

What is quality?

A system of future school development that builds on "quality" must describe in detail what it understands by quality and which values and principles it espouses.

The different stakeholders at school and the different levels of the school system have different conceptions of the notion of quality:

- **“Good pupils“** are those who participate in classroom work actively and out of their own accord and who develop self-competence for learning. Instead of ingesting, with the help of a professional facilitator, an external input that can be verified by tests, they empower themselves to learn whatever is required in a given situation. Learning is not so much a process of (mechanical) acquisition, but the active construction of knowledge.
- **“Good teachers“** have the professional ability of making classroom instruction meaningful to their pupils; instruction is sustainable and happens in a positive setting which is characterised by mutual respect, realistic expectations and encouragement. Teaching is not limited to the conveyance of specific contents, but centres on developing the learning competence of pupils.
- **Parents** are at the same time customers and clients of schools, as well as educational partners for teachers; moreover, they are a part of the school partnership system and involved in school management. As clients they are eager for their children to obtain the best possible qualifications. As partners in the educational process, they look for a climate of cooperation that respects their parental duties and allows giving teachers open and critical feedback. The quality of school partnership resides in the right of actual participation in school development.
- **“Good schools“** are not only characterised by good pupils and teachers, but by a rich school life that gives all stakeholders incentives to participate. This presupposes good internal processes at school level, mutual support, good relations with parents and graduates. The effectiveness of a good school becomes evident in that it creates sound opportunities for graduates transferring to other schools or to professional life.
- **At the level of the overall system**, quality implies meeting social demands made on the educational system (in particular equal access to education), making sufficient resources available, and ensuring a capacity to adjust to social change on an on-going basis.

A system to develop and assure quality

A strategic plan for quality development and assurance must achieve a trade-off between the quality requirements of the different stakeholders in the educational

process. The system which is developed in the following therefore subscribes to a number of objectives and values:

- focus on the educational needs of young people,
- link between quality development and quality assessment,
- involvement and shared responsibilities of all stakeholders,
- combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation,
- linking of local development and higher-level system control so as to meet the requirements of the overall system,
- accountability and efficiency of individual schools and of the system as a whole,
- follow-up on existing institutions and traditions to raise the acceptance among those concerned and enable low-cost realisation,
- cooperation with research institutions.

Elements of a quality culture

The following table illustrates in a simplified manner the major components of a quality development and assurance scheme.

System level	QD/QA measures or processes	Products
1. Teachers	1.1. Performance feedback to pupils 1.2. Changes in performance assessment 1.3. Individual feedback for teachers by pupils, parents, peers	Activity reports to school head
2. School	2.1. Human resources development and staff appraisals 2.2. Individual feedback to school head 2.3. Benchmarking 2.4. Institutional feedback (school surveys) 2.5. School programme	School programme Reports to district and province school boards
3. Region (district/province)	3.1. Meta-evaluation of school programmes by district and province school inspectors 3.2. Regional development planning including self-evaluation 3.3. Independent complaints office	Regional school development plan (district and province) Reports Publications
4. Austria	4.1. System monitoring, including educational statistics 4.2. Focused evaluations 4.3. National development projects 4.4. Self-evaluation of the central school authority	Educational statistics “National Education Report“ Reports to Parliament Research reports

For ease of reference, this summary focuses on the core elements of a quality culture. The wider framework, which is elaborated in detailed in the study underlying this

summary, presents the context of these elements: who is responsible for a specific measure, who supports and monitors it, and which resources are available for that purpose.

In the interest of clarity, the different elements are briefly explained in the following.

- **At the level of teachers (classroom instruction):** The measures in this area are to raise awareness of quality demands in terms of teaching and learning.
 - This includes differentiated feedback on pupil's performance in support of the learning process.
 - Performance assessment is the central element of quality assurance at instruction level. Experience with alternative forms of assessment which are better geared to the changed notion of learning needs to be gained to complement traditional forms of assessment.
 - Teachers need individual feedback to be able to tailor their teaching to the given requirements. They should seek feedback at regular intervals from pupils, parents, and also from peers. An exchange with other teachers is a key instrument for advancing the quality of teaching.

- **Quality development and assurance at school level:** At school level, it is important that the school as a whole assumes responsibility for the quality of the teaching process and does not leave it to the individual. Measures in this field include i.a.
 - *Appraisal interviews and service assessments*, time-proven instruments of human resource management.
 - *Benchmarking*, comparing the school's own results with internal and external data so as to be able to realistically assess school performance. This can be done by reference to the results of international comparative studies or national assessments.
 - *School surveys* are surveys that relate to characteristic features at a school, e.g. the school climate, pupils' performance or other aspects of school life.
 - *Individual feedback for the school head:* Not only pupils and students, but also school heads rely on feedback as a prerequisite for a common further development. The school head may receive feedback from the school members, as well as from other schools heads or the school inspectorate.
 - *School-based development and self-evaluation, development plan:* With constant daily and annual routines, schools tend to lose sight of the goals they should or wish to achieve as organisations. Viable development goals

are laid down in annual to bi-annual school programmes; their evaluation is the basis for further activities. The school programme is a key instrument of quality development and assurance at a given school.

- **Quality development and quality assurance at the regional level:** At the level of the districts and provinces, meta-evaluations of the different schools, regional development plans and their regular evaluation as well as an independent complaints office which intervenes as necessary in a competent manner, for a continuous development of school quality.
- **Quality assurance at the national level:** The proposed system relies on four elements to ensure quality at the national level:
 - *System monitoring including educational statistics:* This is the continuous and systematic observation of the quality features of the educational system, such as regular participation in comparative studies.
 - *Focused evaluations i.e.* looking into specific problem areas.
 - *National development projects* are well-targeted interventions in the school system in response to problems repeatedly encountered during evaluations.
 - *“National Education Reports”* are an instrument the central education authority employs to regularly evaluate its own work.

What does a quality culture drive at?

A sustainable quality development and assurance scheme should produce a number of desired effects on the way a school and its stakeholders operate.

Pupils should not be at the “quasi-passive” receiving end of instruction, but become active themselves and assume responsibility for the development of their learning competences. Teachers should understand their own work as a development process which is controlled by feedback on the quality of their work and by objectives that are set with the help of the school head.

The school head and the school inspectorate should deliver their monitoring function by planning, staff management and evaluation of school-based processes. The Ministry of Education should assume this role at the national level and ensure, by institutional measures, support and process monitoring, staff qualification and development at all levels, monitoring and system diagnosis, and the development of a scientific basis for educational policy decisions. As an independent institution

whose members are appointed by the school partners, a permanent “quality conference” is to propagate this model of school development on a broad basis.

To establish this governance philosophy it is also critical to design a modern-day flow of information. Information can flow to wherever it is (urgently) needed only if data on quality indicators exist, good practice examples are readily accessible when needed, and participants are part of a network regardless of their actual location.

Quality in teaching

THESES

- **More than in the past, pupils should receive individual feedback on their performance to be able to improve their scholastic achievements and develop their learning competence.**
- **Traditional performance assessment, which today is an exclusive domain of teachers as providers of instruction, should be complemented by external components, and**
- **New forms of performance documentation should be tested and refined considering their positive impact on development.**
- **Teachers should seek regular feedback from pupils, parents and peers on their classroom work. Peer feedback, primarily through mutual classroom visits, is one of the most effective measures to advance teaching.**

Performance assessment

The scholastic performance of pupils is undeniably a key indicator for the quality of a school. Performance assessment is an instrument used to describe the extent to which the learning process of pupils was promoted. “School reports“ are an eternal subject of educational policy debate. Often, the individual component of scholastic achievement is limited uni-directionally to the quality of a particular school through comparison. It is therefore imperative to deal with the issue of performance assessment on a wider and differentiated basis.

Performance assessment procedures can be used productively only if they are not only understood as a “snapshot“ assessment of individual performance, but also as instruments which serve to strengthen individual performance capacities. Three factors contribute to this aim: performance assessment must refer to pedagogically sound norms on which judgement is based; it must clearly identify the reasons for good or poor performance; and it must be fair on pupils, i.e. it must take account of the pupil’s personal context and social background.

Performance assessment becomes problematic when the underlying norms are unclear. Assessment does not only need a yardstick against which to measure performance as “correct” or “incorrect”, but also a standard which relates a specific performance to a norm.

We can distinguish between three types of reference norms:

- *Social or collective norms*, which measure individual performance by the result of the surrounding group (e.g. a class). This type of reference norm has disadvantages for low-performing pupils as they are caught in an eternal comparison with their high-achieving peers and face little prospect of ever leaving their unfavourable position.
- *Objective norms*, i.e. a catalogue of given and known criteria which applies globally. Objective norms tend to have a positive effect, in particular if all pupils are given an opportunity to find correct solutions with individual assignments.
- *Individual norms*, which form the basis for differentiating pupils in a class. This type of norm has a positive effect on the group, but presupposes a precise and detailed documentation of how each and every pupil develops.

While the question of underlying norms has been frequently discussed (though with limited impact on practical implementation), one other aspect of performance assessment is being largely ignored: *a causal attribution of good/poor performance*.

When attributing the causes of good/poor performance, teachers may have a means of influencing their pupils in some way. Positive reasons strengthen their ability to perform, negative reasons stifle it.

One proposal which has been suggested to arrive at a fair performance assessment is to limit assessment to the contents actually taught and disregard abilities that were acquired elsewhere; or to consider the individual learning context of pupils: In practical terms, this generates massive problems e.g. because the learning context is not known in detail. Since schools cannot limit themselves to assessing and diagnosing performance it is vital to develop prognostic instruments and mechanisms for granting entitlements and to convey these instruments and mechanisms in the course of in-service teacher training.

Innovative forms of performance assessment

Numerous proposals on alternative or complementary forms of performance assessment have been made, from scholastic development reports, assignment books

and direct performance documentation (“portfolio“) to pupil’s self-evaluation. Pilot projects so far have generally limited themselves to the primary level; there is reticence starting with secondary level II.

It is insufficient to supplement reports with extensive explanatory notes or to assess performance only verbally. Whereas this would resolve the non-specific character of marks, it does not eliminate other sources of incorrect assessment such as lacking consideration of the reference norms underlying evaluation. Moreover, comments have rarely been found to be of constant, reliable quality.

Innovative forms of performance assessment should be developed so as to make school reports an instrument that encourages further development. *Two-phase or two-stage assignments* and *direct performance documentations (“portfolios”)* are examples of future models.

The assessment of pupils’ performance is fraught with yet another problem: the fact that teachers, wearing two hats, fulfil two functions vis-à-vis their pupils which are difficult to reconcile for all practical purposes: they assure qualifications in the sense of an all-encompassing promotion of individual development; at the same time they are responsible for selection, i.e. access to, but also temporary or permanent exclusion from, distinct educational options such as higher-level schools or professions. Teachers must cope with a contradictory challenge: promoting development and passing judgment at critical junctions in the development process, which determines future educational careers.

Separating the teaching function from the summative (selective) assessment function through the *externalisation of performance assessment* would relieve teachers to some extent from their double role. It is implemented when pupils document their achievement status to a third-party instance at the crucial moments in their educational careers, rather than vis-à-vis teachers who are responsible for their qualifications. Performance assessment is generally externalised by using centrally developed and administered tests. However, this instrument carries the risk that learning and preparation are exclusively test-centred, or that tests cover cognitive contents at a fairly low level only.

“Team-based externalisation“ is an alternative to tests. Using this method, teachers would all in all fulfil both skill-building as well as selecting tasks, yet not on one and the same learner. They would mutually complement one another on a team basis.

Feedback for teachers

Feedback is a sine qua non for sound teaching. On the one hand, teachers give feedback to their pupils on their progress and behaviour, so as to direct their development. On the other hand, teachers need feedback themselves about how their work is accepted, so that they can refine their methodological repertoire. It is upon the teachers to seek such feedback and/or draw it from the process.

It takes little effort to include feedback from pupils, parents and peers in routine teaching settings. Feedback is a systematic continuation of day-to-day reflection on the teacher's own classroom behaviour.

Areas for which individual feedback is crucial include:

- the learning process (How do pupils learn?),
- the interaction between teachers and learners (e.g. the use of media, assistance rendered when difficulties occur etc.),
- the personal and social development of individual pupils (How is it promoted by the conduct of teachers and the school?),
- the use of time as a learning resource (How many lessons are actually taught or cancelled? How much time is spent on learning, administrative chores, discipline etc.? How much time is needed for homework? etc.)

Although the need for individual feedback has been strongly recognised, many schools are not in a position to implement peer-to-peer feedback mechanisms. Teachers often consider feedback as extra work, many even as a restriction, and fail to see it as an opportunity for their professional development. A tacit agreement on mutual non-interference among teachers is an obstacle to cultivating a feedback culture as much as the fact that teachers hardly spend any working time out of the classroom together at school.

Being directly geared to day-to-day teaching, the cultivation of an adequate organisational culture is therefore a crucial educational policy measure. The development of an organisational culture must be fitted into different dimensions such as initial and in-service training or the support schools receive from the school inspectorate in developing this practice.

Quality development and quality assurance at school level

THESES

- **Schools should regularly develop a school programme and define development projects as part of this plan, take action for their implementation and evaluate their impact.**
- **Schools should match their performance against external comparative data (benchmarks) to be able to realistically assess their quality.**
- **School heads should adopt measures for human resource development (staff appraisals, service evaluations) and regularly evaluate their own activities.**
- **Schools should gain a picture of where they stand by carrying out school surveys on core issues and drawing the necessary consequences.**
- **In order to ensure quality at school level, it appears necessary to build a middle-level management with accountability for certain areas.**
- **In many cases, the “opening of the school” towards the external community is an indispensable requirement for ensuring sustainable learning.**

The school programme as an instrument of continuous further development and evaluation

The white book on the 1999 curriculum was the first to introduce school programmes. At the same time, the Federal Ministry of Education launched the Q.I.S. (Quality in Schools) initiative, an Internet application which provides schools with relevant material for quality management. Q.I.S. is a tool for disseminating the notion of a school programme, as well as a support structure that provides additional assistance to the schools involved in this exchange via the quality network [QN].

The school programmes which have been elaborated by the schools so far on a voluntary basis are to ensure quality development as well as on-going evaluation. The school programme condenses a bundle of factors – pupils’ needs, parental

expectations, teachers' interests and the mandate of the state to provide education. The school programme contains the school's mission statement and a specific development plan in which measures on selected short- and medium-term development goals are agreed and can be evaluated by the school itself.

Whereas the mission statement outlines general objectives and principles for work and coexistence at school, the development plan forms the core element of the school programme. It reports selectively on the development progress achieved and informs about the tasks the school has set for itself for the next one or next two years and how these measures will be evaluated.

A development plan could, for instance, take stock of what happened so far ("survey of drop-out rates over the past six years and comparison with the Austrian average") and what is to be attained in the near future ("The rate of pupils repeating a year is currently 9% at our school compared with 14% of the all-Austrian average. We want to lower this rate by another two percentage points. To achieve this aim, we want to offer a voluntary diagnostic assessment at the moment of enrolment at the school, so as to be able to develop differentiated educational programmes for the different pupils.")

School programmes, in particular the development plans they contain, are a work in progress. To remain useful as an instrument for development, they must be updated on an on-going basis. This creates the necessary awareness about objectives, measures and on-going self-evaluation, which is ultimately the basis for continuous quality development. In this process, self-evaluation, supported by the external view of self-chosen critical friends, becomes the cornerstone of the school's own interest in high-quality work.

School programme and external evaluation

Periodic accountability for the results of one's own work has become an accepted principle these days to ensure quality performance. Two forms are conceivable: evaluation by the school itself within the framework of the school programme, and evaluation by an outside instance (*external evaluation*).

Unlike external evaluation by the school inspectorate, self-evaluation is a necessary corollary of greater independence and self-reliance of the individual schools in the wake of autonomisation. School autonomy carries several hopes: The school is given

to understand that it has responsibility for its own development. Via the evaluation process, it learns how to assess for itself how measures interact and how effective they are; (on-going) improvement of its own work becomes an intrinsic concern of the school rather than the mere wish or dictate imposed by an inspection authority.

However, the quality of self-evaluation needs to be reviewed externally. External evaluation is to be carried out by the school inspectorate within the framework of “meta-evaluation”. A review that is based on the school programmes will mostly suffice to prompt schools into continuous quality assurance.

Measures will be imposed on the basis of a thorough inspection of the work accomplished if the credibility of a school programme is put in doubt or if repeated complaints are voiced about a particular school.

In any case, the results of meta-evaluation will have to be reported back to those concerned in a rapid and transparent manner, so as to arrive at a common assessment of the status quo and of any action which needs to be taken.

Human resources development

Schools are expected to meet a variety of different, complex requirements: vis-à-vis the “recipients“ of school-leavers (higher-level educational institutions and business companies), vis-à-vis the personal wishes and demands of pupils and relatives, and the demands that result from social change. The ongoing professional further development of teachers is vital for being able to cope with permanent change.

The need for their own continuous further development has not yet become self-evident in the professional self-conception of teachers, even though understanding and interest are growing. As much as parents want to see their children being taught at good schools and pupils want to attend good schools, teachers want to work at good schools and achieve personal further development through their work.

Human resources development is not only geared to the individual working in the school system but also an overall process which facilitates this professional further development. Although the focus lies on the individual teacher, human resources development can only become effective if the school organisation has features that facilitate individual learning processes.

The measures which are needed include the development of individual skills (e.g. through further education, consulting or coaching), taking account of the different roles in the working of school, and team development and organisational development measures in respect of the educational mission statement or school programme. A human resources development culture must result from a set of individual measures, with adequate resources – time, money, commitment – being available so that individual professional further development becomes embedded as much as the continuous self-evaluation of the school development process.

Regular *staff appraisals* are a well-established method of human resources development. These interviews are held at least once a year and are well-prepared both by the superiors and by staff members. In these one-to-one appraisal sessions, current tasks and their delivery are debated in depth – analogously to the development and evaluation within the framework of the school programme at school level – as well as the action that is needed both on the part of the staff member concerned and on the part of the organisational set-up (at school). As the outcome of staff appraisals, specific objectives and agreements are to be reached for a given timeframe on the basis of which schools can be further developed as organisations.

Feedback for school management

Calls for evaluation are often voiced in a top-down approach, from school head and the school inspectorate to teacher. As part of the school programme, it is equally important that school management subjects itself to regular self-evaluation and assessment by others, so as to further develop the quality of management.

Its acting as a positive role model is crucial for developing a corresponding feedback and evaluation culture. Evaluation should deal with the quality of organisation, management and counselling as the key tasks of school management.

Written surveys to collect information about how staff members perceive and assess the management style of their school head are a method of evaluation; in this way, the school head will be able to match his/her own self-assessment against the assessment of those who are directly or indirectly concerned (by questions such as “pupils have no difficulty or fear addressing me during breaks out-of-classroom“, which may be answered in the affirmative or in the negative). Structured

conversations, requests to assess the running of staff meetings etc. can be helpful to assess the work of school management via individual feedback.

Feedback for the school management should also come from the non-teaching staff (usually secretariats and caretakers). It is imperative that these areas are equally included in a school's quality efforts; many contacts between parents and the school head succeed or fail due to the quality of the telephone manners in the secretariat.

Institutional feedback: Quality assurance at school level

While individual feedback contributes to quality assurance at the personal level, it is necessary to address issues which relate to the characteristic features of the school or of individual classes. School surveys, in which data for evaluation are collected methodologically on selected topics such as the school climate, pupils' performance, the school values, how complaints from pupils are handled etc., are an adequate instrument for this purpose.

By their very nature, school surveys demand a greater effort than individual feedback. To be successful, they need to be well prepared and carefully implemented. Q.I.S. for instance offers several suggestions on this issue.

For school surveys that deal with broad topics (e.g. the school climate) it has been found useful to seek help from external advisers, given the amount of effort and the degree of complexity involved. External advice, however, can be very costly. The *"modular approach to a self-evaluation of school development projects"* developed by F. Riffert and A. Paschon proposes the following: In a dialogue with the school, the advisors first probe into the burning issues, before resorting to proven instruments that are adapted to the specific topic such as questionnaires or other standardised methods from a pool of modules, and then preparing a tailor-made survey kit for the given school.

The surveys are carried out by external advisers with the support of teachers. The survey results are then returned to the school in the form of a presentation. This ensures that the data remain anonymous vis-à-vis the school members, which is another advantage of external advice in school surveys. The phase of discourse following the presentation may lead to improvement strategies.

Schools are held to engage in self-evaluation following prescribed procedures and to submit periodic reports on the consequences drawn. The schools themselves define the contents of school quality; evaluation covers individual feedback for teachers, as well as school quality surveys which relate to collectively relevant topics.

Absence of a middle management

The Swiss model, where a steering group is set up for every school, pinpoints a problem of schools on which little light has been shed so far: the absence of an organised middle-management structure which would allow schools to cope with the growing tasks delegated to them in the wake of greater autonomy.

As several tasks of an organisational nature have been delegated to schools in recent years, they are facing an increasing need for organisational sub-structures. This need makes itself felt in particular in evaluation projects at school level: an organisational infrastructure is a sine qua non for development initiatives of the type described to be launched. Out of evaluation projects, a form of middle management emerges which lacks a factual legal basis.

These emerging structures may be facing acceptance problems and lacking stability later on, as schools traditionally observe a pattern of personal autonomy and parity: teachers are used to solving work-related problems more or less individually, without consulting their peers. Coordination is therefore quickly equated with control and rejected. At the same time, teachers consider themselves as being formally of equal standing. Teachers who assert their individual profile are therefore often frowned upon. Another psychological problem exists: “administration” at schools does not carry a prestigious status and is often seen in juxtaposition to the teachers’ pedagogical function; organisational tasks are felt to be eating into their time budget and distracting from the actual activity of teaching.

Quality assurance projects are therefore an important step towards improved structures. Even without a legal framework, middle-management instruments can gain a certain degree of acceptance, if steering groups are composed transparently and if their duties are precisely agreed upon. As the Austrian system of education has a strongly centralist tradition, it appears a sine qua non to endow middle management with an adequate legal basis so that it can be implemented on a national scale.

External assistance and advice will be necessary particularly in a transition period of several years, during which schools learn how to handle the new quality assurance instruments. The required resources could come from the In-Service Teacher Training Institutes. However, schools should not become dependent on external consultants when coping with quality care, but build their own know-how – an approach to which the school inspectorate should lend its support.

Schools opening up

For a long time, the world of education was a shut-off enclosure and unaffected by social change.

Today, we are facing sweeping changes. Schools are opening up in two respects: they attract new resources for teaching and learning, and start influencing the region in which they act.

Schools are increasingly becoming aware that they can harness the potentials of their environments for their educational mission and need not limit themselves to “official“ teaching aids. Be it a panel debate on social issues with figures from public life or the use of new technologies such as the Internet, it is one of the major challenges of the current era that schools open up to these new opportunities.

Conversely, the schools themselves influence local and regional settings through projects: Knowledge takes on a new role: instead of being acquired and placed on storage, new knowledge that is geared to a specific situation is generated, either for ecological projects in the local village, children and youth parliaments, or for locally important activities such as language-learning courses. Through the opening of schools towards their surrounding environment, children learn that what they know is essential here and now, not just later in life, a fact which substantially bridges the meaning gap which pupils tend to experience ever so often.

A host of national and international programmes support this opening, EU educational programmes, institutions set up by the Federal Ministry of Education such as *Österreichisches Kulturservice*, as well as private associations e.g. in the field of pupils' exchanges and school partnerships. The decisive pressure that prompts schools to open up comes from the pupils themselves: The discrepancy they experience between real life, the manifold influences out of school, and school life

comes into play as much as the fact that young people are less and less inclined to accept explanations from adults at face value.

The OECD study “Schooling for Tomorrow“ pin-pointed this discrepancy: whereas public institutions strive to check and curb children and adolescents, they have the liberty of fulfilling themselves in their private lives. This may undermine the legitimacy of school-linked (and therefore social) demands, as individuality becomes an end in itself at the loss of social cohesion. By opening up to the outside world, schools can bridge this gap and become a local platform dealing with a variety of issues that affect and move the young. In this way, school would not only be a place that caters to pupils, but also to others who take on responsibility for specific tasks within this comprehensive set-up.

As schools open up they need to re-define their notion of performance, which today hinges on a reproductive approach to knowledge – exemplified by the examination of learning contents. While this may be “economic” from the perspective of schools, because they can easily offer knowledge in this way and easily verify its “acquisition”, it does not meet the requirements for interaction with the ever-changing environment which unfold as schools open up. Here, knowledge is acquired proactively in keeping with the actual situation. Teachers will be confronted with a new challenge of having to develop new performance standards, such as portfolio assessments or the documentation of self-developed knowledge.

The mandate for schools to deal with the life settings of their pupils and involve their environments is by no means new. Given the complexity of the outside world, schools depend on cooperation with other social actors. This, however, blurs the strict separation between school and non-school structures and creates a need for dynamic networks. Modern communication technologies have dramatically expanded this possibility – today, every local class can have the whole world as its partner. In the near future we will have to give stability and reliability to these dynamic networks.

Quality development and quality assurance at the higher levels

THESES

- **The regional school inspectorates should review and evaluate the quality measures adopted by the individual schools, in particular the school programmes (meta-evaluation).**
- **Moreover, they should develop, implement and evaluate a Regional Development Programme that is geared to local and regional needs.**
- **Austria faces a need for system monitoring, i.e. the on-going monitoring of key indicators of the educational system so as to detect ill-directed developments early and capture successful achievements. To this end, the education statistics need to be further developed.**
- **Participation in international comparative surveys yields valuable data on the relative position, the strengths and weaknesses of the national system of education.**
- **Focused evaluations and national development projects are to furnish deeper insight into problems and prompt sustainable improvements.**
- **A National Report on Education is to provide regular accountability on developments in education.**

As schools are increasingly becoming autonomous units, they bear the brunt of responsibility for developing and ensuring high-quality education. School autonomy, however, does not relieve the higher levels – i.e. the regional school authorities, the Ministry of Education, the European Union - from their duties. They are transforming from centralised administrations which used to be responsible for most of the details of school organisation to planning, monitoring and steering institutions.

The regional level

Up to now, it has been the task of the school inspectorate (district and province school inspectors) to ensure quality schooling by monitoring individual teachers and their work. Today, this role is delegated to the schools and school heads, who are to ensure quality within their scope of action by adopting human resources development

measures, by ensuring compliance with the school programme and by carrying out self-evaluation within this framework, i.e. they assume full responsibility, take action to solve the problems identified and review the success attained.

This changes the role of the regional level of education: with re-allocated responsibilities, the school inspectorate no longer looks into the quality of the individual, but evaluates the processes by which schools themselves ensure quality – the development goals, measures and their evaluation in the school programme. While schools ensure quality by self-evaluation, the regional school authorities, via monitoring the self-assessment process (meta-evaluation), are to ensure that the results of school-driven quality assurance actually express what they purport.

Moreover, the regional school authorities have an advisory and supportive function to fulfil, and – if necessary – impose requirements and instructions. Finally, the regional school authorities (e.g. the school inspectorate) are responsible for coordinating human resources and organisational development at district and province level and for ensuring a diverse and comparable supply of education in the region with a regional development plan.

Quality management at the federal level

Quality in education is not merely the sum total of quality at the individual schools. Not every school must offer all of the programmes which the school system as a whole should provide for pupils. Altogether, the school system must offer high-quality education to cater to as many talents and interests as possible. At the same time, not each and every school can specialise in music, sports or computer education. System-inherent objectives, however, must be implemented at every school. These include holistic personality development, foreign language skills of all pupils, or the cultivation of democratic values.

Quality development at the federal level means ensuring maximum diversity, a high degree of educational provision, mobility and equal opportunities, initiating social change e.g. in teaching contents and relations, or the efficient use of the resources at hand. All this cannot happen by quality development at the individual schools alone, but requires adequate monitoring by the higher system levels. Again, the issue at stake is institutionalising on-going self-evaluation. “Which results can be identified? How are they achieved?”

As schools are gaining autonomy and latitude to define their own priorities, the system level will be facing a critical challenge of having to ensure comparability and transfer options, as well as equal educational opportunities against the backdrop of a variety of different schools.

“*System monitoring*“ i.e. the institutionalised monitoring and analysis of school development creates the necessary framework for obtaining an overall picture of how schools develop as a whole. The information compiled allows to take steering measures and to pursue goals for the school system in its entirety. In this process, aspects of the educational system are monitored, analysed and documented at regular intervals by means of structural (class size) or material (pupils’ performance) indicators.

A number of sources already exist: At the international level, these are the regular OECD surveys Education at a Glance, international studies on pupils’ performance such as TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) or PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). Despite the problem of comparability (and of different survey qualities in the different countries) and their high cost, these studies have gained in status in recent years for their regularity and standardisation, and have sparked a debate at the national level on the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system which could serve as a starting point for reform.

These international comparative surveys provide first guidance for a national system of educational monitoring. Elements of interest include i.a. pupil flow analyses, economic indicators on resources spent, national surveys on pupils’ performance, studies on the use of computers as well as surveys on violence at schools, the prevention of drug use, on the confidence citizens place in the school system, the image of teachers and on additional educational programmes desired.

A monitoring system as described results in an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system and becomes a basis for development planning. Problems in the different regions or sectors can be detected at an early moment in time and addressed by appropriate action. For schools, it provides a necessary reference frame against which they can compare their own results and define objectives for their development.

Not all of the data that are required at the federal level to steer the system need to be collected centrally. If seriously implemented at the different schools and in a given region, the policy of self-evaluation results in an abundant wealth of information. However, the assessments need to be analysed across different schools in a meta-analysis. By collating these reports it is possible to identify major trends at schools, as well as “blind spots“ or recurrent problems that are indicative of an inadequate framework and suggest a need for the higher level to take action.

- **International system monitoring:** The purpose of international comparisons of indicators is to match the development of the national educational system up to that of “competing” nations. With progressing global interdependencies, this is an important aspect which allows to learn from one another and, increasingly, to attain a common frame in education. First published in 1992 and drafted at bi-annual intervals, the OECD reports on Education at a Glance already mentioned play a pivotal role. While this type of OECD report, which covers some 50 indicators, focuses on structural issues such as educational participation, educational flows, educational degrees and certificates, economic factors etc., OECD started in 1998 to deal with material issues in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report which has gained publicity through comprehensive media coverage. Starting in the year 2000, PISA examines the performance of pupils aged 15 to 16 in reading, reading comprehension, mathematics and science at three-year intervals. This comprehensive survey aims at compiling data for comparison and evaluation, and at suggesting improvements and generating public interest in educational issues.
- **National system monitoring:** Austria has relatively elaborate national educational statistics. However, there is no system of national educational indicators and no coordination of the different activities at the national level. A regular compilation comparable to the OECD report on education would be most desirable. Moreover, Austria does not have a uniform national system of school leaving examinations or admission testing that could be used to analyse how performance develops. School-leaving examinations such as the “*Matura*” are administered by the individual schools and do not reflect results that are amenable to generalisation or could serve as a basis for system monitoring.

Alongside Germany and Switzerland, Austria lags behind in the development of such output evaluations i.e. an evaluation of the results generated by the educational process by reference to the performance of its participants. Most

OECD countries in contrast already conduct assessments, some even on an annual basis. A prerequisite for such assessments are relevant data which allow a valid analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system and the definition of objectives.

National assessments tend to cover selected subjects and to evaluate critical moments of transfer, such as the completion of primary education or of secondary levels I and II. Frequently, these surveys are not conducted by the responsible school authorities, but by assessment centres, university institutes, private companies or mixed private/public structures which are specifically set up for that purpose.

- **Benchmarking:** While international and national monitoring yields an overall view of the aggregate performance of the educational system, benchmarking is a specific method of using data (e.g. average performance of pupils in given subjects) which allow schools and classes (or individual teachers) to perform a voluntary comparison with national, supra-regional or international data and to draw consequences from the results for the further development on site (school programme!). This process is perfectly natural – we compare ourselves almost daily in personal matters such as clothing, behaviour or professional conduct with models and emulate and adopt successful elements. The world of business and several public-sector companies frequently use benchmarking, i.e. comparisons with successful reference companies, for quality development. Characteristically, this method is focused on “learning from those who do better“. To arrive at this aim, quality indicators that can later be surveyed and compared first need to be defined. Basically, quality indicators can be defined for all areas of schooling, from resources and methods to outcomes and results. Different classes within one school may compare themselves with one another, as well as schools against one another, or an entire educational system with any other. Internal comparisons are a good starting point for a benchmarking process before a school wishes to perhaps subject itself to an external comparison. Benchmarking systems are already being developed in several countries such as the USA and Australia.

Further development of the educational statistics

The educational statistics maintained by the Federal Ministry of Education are a cornerstone in the development of a comprehensive system of educational monitoring. They furnish comprehensive data on the different aspects of the educational system on an on-going basis. These educational statistics are predominantly input-oriented, in that they record the resources channelled into the educational system, such as the number of teachers, schools, classes. However, the information they yield on outputs, i.e. the results which the system generated using this input, is limited. Key indicators e.g. for economic aspects of the educational system, educational careers or the social context (e.g. social background, cultural background, regional characteristics of schools), are still lacking for the time being.

With progressing school autonomy, i.e. the decentralisation of schooling, educational statistics run the risk of being denied access to some information, resulting in a poorer view of the overall picture.

At the same time, educational indicator systems are being developed within the European Union and other international fora such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD) which have an impact on the national level as well. The standardisation of the statistical systems of the European Union has brought about changes for the Austrian statistical service *Statistik Austria*, which generates major parts of the educational statistics for the Ministry of Education.

To be able to further develop the educational statistics it is important to analyse which data and information is required for educational policy decisions. This analysis reveals the areas that still need to be covered by the educational statistics. Detailed financial data, which are now virtually inexistent, and a link between the financial input and the outcomes and quality features of schools appear to be priorities.

In-depth surveys to complement broad-based diagnoses

While system monitoring gives an overall view of the school system as a whole and its strengths and weaknesses, focused evaluations yield information about which action is useful or required to redress pin-pointed problems.

Four aspects are critical for their adoption: cyclical implementation, which may be carried out by different researchers, but is planned and coordinated by a small, institutionalised team to ensure continuity; focus on a clearly delimited theme of

strategic relevance for education, unlike the evaluation of schools or higher-level systems of education; methodological soundness in the face of ultra-short deadlines, so that information reaches the competent bodies without delay; finally the preparation of resultant reports for different users such as practitioners, administrators and policy-makers.

External performance assessment

In most European countries, particularly in the German-speaking area, pupils' performance is assessed only by the teachers who give instruction. The Anglo-Saxon countries by contrast are characterised by a strong feature of external performance assessment. These external assessments, mainly tests, do not only serve for granting entitlements (e.g. admission to higher-level schools and universities) but are also used for quality control and school rankings.

The trend towards externalising performance assessment must be seen in the light of growing school autonomy. In the absence of uniform, central quality requirements on educational provision at schools, it is all the more necessary to install "objective" examinations of the results which schools, now acting more freely than in the past in designing classroom instruction, produce.

In fact, both approaches – teacher-based assessment (TBA) and external assessment (EA) have their merits and downsides. Many arguments speak for the two systems being complementary, and little points to a need for opting for one or against the other. Teacher-based assessments ensure a better feedback for the learner, because they are given during instruction and because teachers have relevant context information.

On the other hand, teacher-based assessments are hardly comparable; surveys on the quality of TBA concur that teachers are fairly able to determine the relative performance of pupils within their class; however, the performance underlying one and the same mark may vary considerably between classes.

With external assessments, all pupils are subject to equal demands. The results become better amenable to comparison. In terms of the social relations at the school, external evaluation divorces the role of "teachers" from that of (summative, selective) "assessors". Supporting pupils in passing external examinations can

become a vital component of the teacher-pupil relation, as both work towards a common end.

External assessments are not entirely devoid of problems, however. It has been documented that the learning process becomes unilaterally centred on the given tests, and that purely extrinsic interests and pupils' quid-pro-quo mentality (performance against positive test result) are given preference over subject-matter interests, or that teachers delegate some of their responsibility for scholastic success and abandon problem-ridden pupils more readily.

Viewed from the angle of the school system as a whole, external assessments yield data on the development of scholastic performance and allow the test developers to indirectly influence the design of teaching as the latter ultimately hinges on the quality requirements of the test. In this way, desired changes of teaching contents can be adopted more quickly in practice than via the curricula, whose interpretation ultimately rests with the (increasingly autonomous) schools. The test requirements are transparent, understandable also for parents. Schools can expect parental pressure of instantly living up to their contents. However, a focus on tests may seriously diminish the educational programmes offered and runs counter the above-described trend towards an opening and community-orientation of schools.

The positive synergies which both assessment approaches harbour should be harnessed in the interest of quality development and quality assurance: On the one hand, teacher-centred assessments should be further developed and pure grading should be complemented by a more direct documentation of performance, as is possible in the portfolio approach mentioned above. The diagnostic and supportive components which are linked to teacher-based assessments are significant. On the other hand, it is important to include external assessments whenever entitlements are granted on the basis of scholastic performance; the school system in turn should harness the potential offered by external assessments for monitoring and steering.

The introduction of external assessments in the Austrian school system can be rightly described as a "break of culture" that goes beyond usual evolutionary adjustments. This is why utmost caution is called for. The development of national tests for specific cohorts, e.g. pupils aged 10 and 14 that are first carried out on representative samples would be an appropriate first step. The teachers would thus find an opportunity to deal with the quality requirements of the tests and to position their pupils in a national comparison.

As a first start, the schools should be encouraged to agree on joint testing methods and assignments so as to make assessments more objective within one and the same school. Subjecting written examinations – or at least a sample – to a further assessment is one way to arrive at more objective results; this brings about a gradual harmonisation of the assessment standards which commonly vary significantly depending on the different teachers. Teacher teams could cooperate between classes or schools on that basis in performance assessment, in particular at defining moments such as the completion of secondary level I or the *Matura* secondary higher school-leaving examination.

Quality development in a European context

Social change in recent years has been strongly characterised by internationalisation and, in the wake of Austria's accession to the European Union, by a focus on the European context. The internationalisation of life, migration, and European integration accelerate the transformation from an industrial to a knowledge-based society.

More than in the past, the European Union has been addressing educational issues, so as to create comparable frameworks in the transition to a knowledge-based society through coordinating member states. The key documents and policies in this area are the Programme of Work and the Objectives Report on which it builds.

European integration has made it possible for Austria to fully participate in the educational programmes and to share in the design of European educational policy; an opportunity which Austria used, during its EU presidency in the second half of 1998, to work against narrowing the notion of education to employability under the motto "Education is more". Alongside its commitment at EU level, Austria has stepped up educational cooperation with its central and eastern European neighbours after the opening of the borders in a number of projects and regular conferences.

At the extraordinary summit in Lisbon in the year 2000, the European Union charted the course for a liberation of educational policy from the niche status it had held so far and assigning it a key role in the overall political concept: In the future, education is to take over a steering function "at the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society". This is to bring about for the first time a genuine European educational policy with uniform educational policy objectives.

In February 2001, the European Council on Education finally defined three strategic goals for the coming ten years on the basis of this resolution: increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems, ensuring access for everyone, and opening up education and training systems to the world (EU Objectives Report on Educational Policy). “Improving basic skills, in particular IT and digital skills, is a top priority to make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world“ was one of the conclusions formulated by the European Council in Stockholm in March 2001.

The Austrian school system for its part will have to assess and integrate the EU requirements in the steering process between independently acting schools and regional and national demands on educational and quality standards.

Although education is to carry substantive weight in EU policy-making, as reflected in the decisions of the Lisbon Summit of 2000 and the following Objectives Report of 2001, it remains a highly delicate issue for the European Community. Quality in education is a major driving force of European integration, both in business and society; however, education and training are also those policy areas in which members strongly insist on their independence and defend the principle of subsidiarity.

The European Union’s approach to education and training remains ambivalent, in spite of the recent resolutions favouring stronger community policies on educational issues. SOKRATES and LEONARDO DA VINCI have meanwhile gained high status with educational institutions as EU educational programmes. However, issues relating to system control – and therefore to a common policy – are still viewed with reticence.

The approach which the EU member states are now adopting consists in defining common indicators for the quality of education and European benchmarks, so as to break with the prevailing taboo of direct comparison between educational systems. The intention is not a ranking of nations or schools, but a good-practice approach in which countries that score well in specific areas take over a guidance function for others in terms of educational policy practice.

The changing educational profession

THESES

- **Teachers must relinquish some of their “autonomy” in class, assume school development functions and cooperate more closely with their peers.**
- **If teachers are to assume new tasks beyond classroom instruction, they need a place to work at school and a different remuneration scheme.**
- **School heads need new management and human resource development skills; in parallel, schools need to build a permanent middle-level management structure.**
- **The role of the school inspectorate is changing towards coordinating the individual schools and evaluating their outputs.**
- **Quality development and quality assurance must be firmly integrated as an issue in initial and in-service teacher training.**

Educational reforms such as school autonomy and quality development and assurance entail substantial changes for those working in this area, notably the teaching profession. Educational systems require large numbers of staff; schools spend some 80% of their resources on staff; at the European scale, staff in education account between 4% and 7% of the entire workforce. In some regions, up to 25% of the total population are “employed“ as teachers or as pupils.

For changes in the educational system to be implemented, it is important to systematically transform the related professions. As the annual rotation rate among teachers is less than 2-3%, reforms in teacher training alone will not suffice. An all-out effort at the level of in-service training and organisational development is therefore imperative.

A changed self-image of teachers

Even though certain aspects of autonomy and quality policy have met with favourable acceptance from the educational profession, this acceptance has not been

satisfactory at all schools so far; neither can it be expected that the educational profession will automatically show the readiness and backing needed when educational policies are reformed across the entire system. After all, the gap between the professional expectations tied to more independent schools, in tandem with accountability vis-à-vis the supervisory bodies, and the individualist autonomy of teachers which has so far characterised the self-concept of teachers, is too wide. Quality initiatives overcome the principle of official equality of all teachers and of the teacher's autonomy in the classroom. In the future, teachers will have to engage in a closer dialogue with their peers, as well as with pupils and parents, and make their work more transparent.

In a nutshell: teachers are to transform from lone fighters to team players. The working time of a teacher consists of classroom teaching, preparation and follow-up activities, as well as a host of other duties, from school programme development to participation in internal decision-making processes, parent/teacher relations and public relations for their schools. This fundamentally new understanding of the profession places new requirements on professional qualifications, work organisation and – notably – the working time model which has remained virtually unchanged since the early 19th century.

At the level of knowledge and skills, the stake is two-fold: One, new, organisation-related tasks which are required for schools acting with increasing autonomy, alongside specialist know-how on e.g. business organisation, project management etc. Two, new demands on the further development of teaching in terms of new educational objectives such as dynamic skills or new teaching methods and the new information and communication technologies.

Widening autonomy and quality development affect the existing working time model and the service regulations, which used to be largely based on the delivery of teaching units. The work model of teachers has always consisted in a duality of workplaces: instruction in class, preparations and follow-up at home. Public understanding of this dual basis is limited; often, the number of teaching units is equalled to the total workload, which is in no way consistent with reality.

The new demands such as teamwork, assuring organisational/business management tasks in more autonomous schools, development and evaluation as part of the school programme requires teachers to work at school and have their own desk at school, which is hardly the case today. Experts dealing with the current organisation of

school development agree that the Federal Service Code needs to be adjusted along the provisions now applying to province-employed teachers in the new *Landesdienstlehrergesetz (Province-Employed Teacher Service Act)*.

Work can be re-allocated on a project basis by reducing the teaching workload in compensation for participation in school development activities, or by setting up some form of middle management to take over new responsibilities in education. For this, existing posts could be upgraded. Moreover, schools should be given adequate resources for specific functions. Upgraded and new posts offer a prospect of promotion within the profession and new career incentives, which are virtually inexistent today, apart from the function of the school head. As a logical consequence of greater autonomy and accountability of the individual schools, school heads will need to have a greater say in the first-time recruitment of teachers.

Changed role of school management

Not only teachers, but also school heads face new challenges with greater autonomy and quality development. These include school and organisational development skills, human resources development for their own staff, and a stronger external orientation vis-à-vis parents, the local community and out-of-school partners, also vis-à-vis the non-school sector of education. Managerial and business management know-how are needed more than in the past to be able to encourage and support new developments.

Unlike private organisations, the educational sector has so far neglected to train staff for leadership and management functions. Further education will be a core issue in the future, so that school heads may acquire the skills needed for their changing roles. Moreover, it will be useful to set up special study programmes for school management and school development.

In addition to school heads acquiring the personal skills needed for coping with the tasks of school management, structural measures need to be implemented. These include the installation of temporary, project-type management functions, so as to move from school heads as individuals to a broader management structure. These positions need to be upgraded from a legal (and financial) perspective to satisfy the growing demands placed on the individual schools; in some countries (such as Italy) this development has resulted in larger organisational units for which a school head is now responsible. Other aspects equally need to be worked on: appointment

procedures that meet the new professional criteria, and the introduction of a limited term for first-time appointments as a fundamental principle. In all of the OECD countries, women are underrepresented in career posts at schools; accordingly, promotion programmes in favour of women are needed to ensure better career prospects for female staff.

Changes at the levels of the school inspection and the school administration

Greater autonomy and quality policies alter the roles of school inspection in two ways: direct inspection is largely replaced by monitoring the quality of self-evaluation (meta-evaluation); direct inspection will be necessary on a sample basis only when intervention is called for. As the individual schools become more independent, the school inspectorate will become responsible for regional development planning.

These changes give rise to demands as to the new role of school inspection, i.a. the coordination of schools, so that their individual profiles add up to a comprehensive educational supply in the region; supporting school heads and their networking with counterparts, the further development of the regional educational infrastructure; meta-evaluation of schools as a quality assurance task; providing training and counselling; intervention in conflicts which are unveiled through on-going school monitoring; and finally evaluation at system level, i.e. self-evaluation of the school inspectorate.

Further education and, ensuingly, a tailored skill-building programme are useful not only for school heads, but also for regional management functions, so that the current school inspectors are able to live up to their new tasks.

As schools are being decentralised by the regional and central school administrations and strengthened as autonomous units, the role of the higher-level administration will be seeing a dramatic change; unlike the impact of autonomy and quality policies on the individual schools and teachers, these changes have been hardly discussed at all.

Until now it was the educational administration which imposed requirements on the individual schools by way of laws, implementing provisions and government-approved teaching aids; the school inspectorate in turn ensured that this input was implemented in compliance with the pertaining rules and regulations. Moreover, the school administration has a say in the initial and in-service training of teachers.

In the future, the school administration will be responsible above all for reviewing output quality. Even with greater independence of the individual schools, the system level will not forgo its possibilities of steering and intervention, as it is accountable to the individual citizens for making sure that they can enforce their right to education, as well as answerable for the sound use of government funds.

A number of strategies exist for this steering function by which the school administration can gain influence on the individual school. A *contractual relation* may emerge between the *system and partly autonomous schools* on the basis of performance agreements which are concluded for a given period of time and compliance with which can be verified and demanded. The school programme would be a core feature of such an agreement. *Accreditations*, as used for the *Fachhochschule* sector, are a form of contractual relation, too. Here, funding for schools is contingent upon defined outputs which are verified at given intervals.

Another way of exercising influence is to *allocate means only to distinct elements of educational provision*, as is currently the case for the integration of disabled children in secondary general education. Schools aspiring to benefit from these additional resources need to commit themselves to including these developments in their school programmes and therefore to evaluating corresponding outputs.

In Austria, the debate on steering instruments has focused on “agreements” and “evaluation” as instruments at the different levels. However, this form of school development strategy has not been practically implemented anywhere yet, nor has its development been studied. Given the complexity of the existing school organisation and the legislation in force, the implementation of the “agreement” idea will raise numerous questions about sanctions and scopes for intervention.

Greater autonomy and quality policies will have to entail structural reform in Austria, also at the level of the regional and central school administrations, as has been documented by international examples. The most radical example is that of Sweden, where the central ministry which employed some 1,300 persons in 1991, was re-constituted and now has a staff of only 60 people, in the wake of a massive shift of powers to communities and schools. In turn, a national agency (SKOLWERKET) was set up, which supports schools in educational planning and evaluation and employs some 250 people.

Quality in initial and in-service training

The new demands on professional qualifications of teachers, school heads and school inspectors make clear that the policy of autonomy and quality development must be incorporated in the relevant initial and in-service training programmes. A look at the state of Austria's teacher training establishments – universities, teacher-training colleges and in-service teacher training institutes – reveals that the topic has not yet found its way into the curricula of these institutions. If at all, school development is taught in limited, voluntary courses or in events of an experimental nature. The fact that *universities* are under an obligation to evaluate their own work ever since 1993 has been helpful. It creates awareness about a quality process at schools and the need for preparing students in university training for this process.

The situation at the teacher-training colleges (*Pädagogische Akademien*) is less bleak than at universities. The new *Akademie-Studiengesetz* (1999) and the Q.I.S. – Quality in Schools initiative launched by the ministry which is linked to the new curriculum for secondary level I (2000) have generated impetus for dealing with the “q” issue, i.e. quality development and assurance, as is reflected by corresponding course programmes and pilot projects. A number of topics are crucial for inclusion in the training of intending compulsory school teachers: what characterises a good school and good instruction; work on the school programme, approaches to school evaluation.

Unlike initial teacher training, *in-service teacher training* already offers a varied programme on school development that is core for a quality policy in education. A glance at the programmes which offer e.g. courses on “Controlling and quality management as a task of modern-day school management“, or school-based training events on school development, shows that the in-service training establishments are taking on the challenges placed on them by their customers in the field of quality. Founded in early 2000, ÖFEB, the Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education (*Österreichische Gesellschaft für Forschung und Entwicklung im Bildungsbereich*), is expected to spark impetus for the further professionalisation of the teaching profession.

Subject-matter didactics, which has a special role to play in the development of new skills for teachers, unfortunately has been neglected in Austria. Subject-matter didactics often leads a marginalised existence at Austrian universities, characterised by the understanding that the subject-matter know-how required has to be “scaled down” to the level of the respective year. In contrast, subject-matter didactics should

serve as a work-related science which gives teachers a tool to cope with their changing profession, at the level of contents and of school organisation. This implies independent research carried out in this area and a systematic interaction of theory and practice so as to build a support system for school practice.

The quality environment

THESES

- **The school psychological service is to be involved in quality development.**
- **A complaints office (“school ombudsman”), which is independent of the school administration, is to be set up for problem situations.**
- **Quality development and assurance necessitate a reform of the overall framework (e.g. curricula, teaching aids, legal and financial framework etc.)**

Support from the school psychological service

Originally set up to work with individual pupils, the scope of activities of the school psychological service has expanded in recent years to include a variety of tasks in support of school development. It deals with pupils showing behavioural problems, supervises teachers, participates in the assessment process preceding the appointment of new school heads, monitors instruction and advises teachers, provides assistance in implementing feedback processes and surveys e.g. on the school climate.

Given this wide scope of activities it is only natural to involve the school psychological service in quality development.

Although the school psychological service acts outside the immediate classroom work, it is - unlike external consultants - an integral part of the system, a fact which may have a potentially beneficial effect on cooperation with teachers.

The school ombudsman

The conflict-solving ability of schools is a specific aspect of quality development, when individual teachers crassly fail to meet the demands for quality in instruction and, specifically, the way in which they interact with pupils. This small, even negligible group may nevertheless cause serious disruptions at the personal and institutional levels on account of their behaviour, and even lastingly disturb the

relation between schools and the public, which in turn leads to a social devaluation of how school performs.

Almost always there is an awareness of such problems in the closer environment of schools; rarely however is it possible to find solutions, as the relations of stakeholders are interwoven in a most complex fashion and sound and reliable procedures for identifying and solving conflicts of this kind are virtually inexistent. Moreover, there are hardly any accepted quality standards, and the autonomy of the individual teachers in designing classroom teaching, which has been described elsewhere in this report, generally give rise to a “policy of non-interference“. Therefore, school heads must expect staff to take sides with an implicated colleague when problems are voiced; the school inspectorate has little scope for direct action. Since tenured teachers de facto cannot be dismissed, intervention is more or less doomed to fail. Even parents are known to shun conflicts with teachers out of a concern that their children may suffer disadvantages.

It seems to make sense to install a crisis intervention body for grave problems, a school ombudsman (of the type set up in the province of Upper Austria), preferably at the regional level. Different instances could trigger the crisis intervention mechanism: the implicated teacher, the school head or school inspectorate, pupils or parents. In such a case, a qualified intervention team, which is to be composed as the need arises, will examine the case, hold interviews and propose appropriate solutions to the competent authority.

Quality framework

The state exercises influence by designing and steering framework conditions. This includes creating the infrastructure for the qualification of teachers, defining their working time, creating the organisational setting at schools for the delivery of the educational mandate, defining class sizes, providing curricula and teaching aids, school equipment, a service code etc.

If schools are to meet the new requirements of school development driven by quality development and quality assurance, it will be necessary to review this framework.

- **Curricula:** Comprehensive empirical surveys carried out in Germany have shown that the influence of the curriculum on daily planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching tends to be overrated. However, the 1999 draft

curriculum (secondary general and secondary academic schools) includes aspects that may stimulate innovation.

These approaches are to be taken up in the drive for quality: less centrally prescribed requirements, but including in any case “dynamic” skills as interdisciplinary quality requirements, a core area that is fleshed out by the schools by add-on elements; as well as didactic principles which place the young and their living environments in the centre.

- **Teaching media:** Approved textbooks – known also as the secret curricula – are crucial for the quality of teaching; very often, they make up a sizeable part of the teaching units, both in terms of contents as well as methodology. Textbooks (and as a consequence also electronic media, particularly the Internet) harbour a vast potential for quality development in teaching. A survey on textbooks carried out in Salzburg documents that this potential is not being fully exploited. On average, the textbooks studied are of mediocre quality. State approval apparently does not suffice as a quality seal.

CD ROMs, while capable of enhancing the learning process of pupils, can de facto hardly be used in classroom teaching. Textbooks will be also facing competition from the Internet. Web-based learning is still in its infant stages, notably in Austria; increasingly, however, Internet-based teaching aids will ideally meet the requirements of high-quality schooling and will cover entire courses. Moreover, the Internet offers a means of communication with and between teachers.

However, unsolved issues such as content control need to be settled. After all, non-approved contents are only a mouse click away from approved contents. The question is not one of using the Internet, but of the conditions in which to use this medium in teaching.

- **Legal framework:** Austria’s schools find themselves tied in a highly complex and intricate corset of legal provisions on schooling, service and remuneration that are consistent with the notion of school as a government authority and often perceived as a limitation to educational logics. Moreover, as an Austrian specificity, school organisation laws are constitutional laws and therefore extremely inflexible. In the late 1980s, criticism of the “bureaucratic school system” has led to some autonomy of schools and to a wider room for manoeuvre being granted to the individual schools.

A new understanding of the overall social framework has emerged in recent years in educational research, which assesses not only the legal, but also the

political and economic conditions and which sees school set in a tripolar field of tension: the “state”, the “market” (parents, pupils), and the “profession” (teachers).

Whereas the *state* has been downsizing for years, important prerequisites for a more autonomous management of schools still need to be created. At the same time, the self-confidence of *parents* (“consumers on the market“) has grown vis-à-vis school as an authority and vis-à-vis the teachers, even though many parents still experience a sense of unilateral dependence. The decrease in pupil numbers will reinforce the “market pressure” in the future and lead to more differentiated programmes.

The teachers for their part are faced with new challenges regarding their professional authority and autonomy, as autonomy is shifting from the classroom to the school level, from the individual teacher to the school community. In their subjective assessment, their work has become more stressful, as the rate of pupils with behavioural problems is rising and unsolved societal and familial problems are burdened onto the school etc.

The joint responsibility for the quality of instruction and the further development of schools as a whole must be legally embedded with a view to the quality policy aspired. The work of a teacher consists not only of classroom work, but also of contributions to the advancement of their schools. Burdens can thus be shared more equitably, and the strengths in a team can be bundled, leading to greater work satisfaction. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the position of the school head and to offer adequate in-service training. This will ensure that the new autonomous scopes for action can be leveraged.

- **Financial framework:** In recent years, the financial situation of schools has been characterised by stronger cost awareness. Spending on education is steadily on the increase. In the face of national budget consolidation efforts, there is a mounting pressure on staff and operating costs. The reasons are twofold: pedagogical innovations (continuous school development, remedial courses tailored to children speaking a mother tongue other than German, the integration of disabled children etc.) as well as an increase in staff expenditure due to the age structure of the body of teachers, in which the 40 to 50 age bracket is represented most strongly today.

Tightening budgets are a considerable challenge for the desired quality assurance and quality development drive. It will primarily have to be funded by a re-allocation of funds. Greater flexibility in school organisation and other federal requirements can release funds for school development and evaluations etc.

The possibility of re-allocating budget funds from the centre – which is relieved from tasks in the wake of autonomisation – to the periphery will have to be examined. In doing so, it will be necessary to set up a middle management at schools and clearly define its functions as well as that of external advisory bodies.

- **Institutionalisation of central functions:** In order to establish a national system of quality development and quality assurance, certain functions must be established at a “meta level” beyond the immediate skill-building and advice functions of the individual schools. These functions can be grouped in three areas:
 - *Qualification and development:* i.e. the further education and training of key function holders, the development of standards for practice-oriented initial and in-service training, and the implementation of model projects.
 - *Diagnosis and monitoring:* Diagnostic instruments must be developed and central development requirements of the school system must be identified in line with international developments.
 - *Networking and policy analyses:* In this area it is important to link up data and initiatives. A key instrument for institutionalising this cooperation would be a “National Report on Education” which gives a current overall view and suggestions on future priorities.

A number of the existing institutions could act as “nuclear cells” for the institutionalisation of these vital tasks. The in-service teacher training institutes, the PISA Centre at Salzburg University, the Department for Interdisciplinary Research and Further Education (IFF) at Klagenfurt University, and the Centre for School Development could become competence centres for quality development. A separate body which defines follow-up measures after monitoring and makes recommendations will be needed to steer the national quality system; this body could consist of a mixed committee with representatives from business, politics and government chaired by the Federal Ministry of Education.

Implementing strategies

The overall quality development strategy that has been presented in the preceding chapters contains a bundle of innovations for the school system, whose implementation requires major efforts from all stakeholders, as it goes hand in hand with changes of ingrained role perceptions of a large professional group. For such fundamental and comprehensive change to be successful, some principles of organisational theory should be borne in mind. The following operational principles are essential:

- **Clear visions and goals:** The novelty aspired must be described with great clarity as a vision, together with the anticipated merits. Only once clarity has been established and the vision legitimated will it be possible to closely involve and confront the stakeholders in a meaningful manner.
- **Communication and identification of all stakeholders:** Change can be successful only if all members of an organisation identify with the aspired transformations. This presupposes intense communication on the motives and objectives of changes. A detailed communication strategy is therefore indispensable.
- **Scope for self-organisation:** Transformations must allow the staff members they affect a scope to participate within their very own spheres in the concrete design of these transformations. This is why the targets and approaches must allow for sufficient scope for such commitment.
- **Resources for change:** Even if change is to come about at zero-cost, material and non-material means are needed for its implementation.
- **Experimental, evaluative attitude:** Given the complexity of the system, the impact of changes can not always be fully foreseen; change must consist of a process of cautious trying out of measures and their evaluation.

Priorities

In spite of all-pervading interdependencies, prioritisation with regard to implementability and anticipated effects is needed. Four areas are suggested as priorities for implementation:

- **A nation-wide implementation of the school programme approach:** This policy has been discussed in depth in recent years, and elaborated at length; it has already been tested at many schools in Austrian pilot projects and builds on the experience of other countries.
- **Further development of the policy of regional development planning:** This is the logical follow-up to individual school programmes and supports the shift of educational decisions from the central bodies to those who have educational responsibility in the regions.
- **Pilot projects on a moderate degree of external performance assessment:** A step toward external assessment strengthens the orientation towards generally binding success criteria beyond the instruction of individual teachers and is a counter-balance to autonomisation, as it goes hand in hand with objectivity and social fairness.
- **Development of educational standards and studies on system monitoring:** This allows to define minimum standards of effective teaching, strengthens awareness about central educational objectives, and makes examples of good practice identifiable. The data generated from self-evaluations span a bridge to international developments in terms of standards and indicators.

These four areas form a cross-section across all the aspects and levels addressed by a comprehensive system of quality development and quality assurance. Some – such as the school programme – have been sufficiently elaborated to be implemented without delay, whilst others still need to be tested before they can be applied on a wider scale. The principles set out above apply to the implementation of each of these priorities: formulate clear visions, develop a strategy of communication with all stakeholders, allow for free scope in implementation, provide resources for change management.

A steering body in the Ministry of Education will be required to support the implementation of these individual components of the quality system. It will have

three tasks to fulfil: one, to coordinate, at ministry level, the activities of the different bodies affected by the endeavour. Two, to provide a separate communication mechanism which conveys the overall strategy, organises exchange and integration, and seeks and processes feedback – tasks which could be assumed by Q.I.S., the quality-in-schools initiative. And three, coordinate all resources which are needed for change: training measures, material, advice and support – for which a number of new concepts will have to be developed.