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(EDC-QA PROJECT)

*Stocktaking on quality assurance
in education and EDC*

*Country report : Slovenia
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1. Current interest in “Quality in Education in Slovenia

1.1. Is there evidence of public or professional interest in “Quality in education” in your country – particularly within government? What form does that interest take? Is there awareness of the current international interest in this field?

The **school legislation** adopted in 1996 **altered the structure of the evaluation system** to a large extent. The new relationships and responsibilities for quality in education are essentially grounded in legislation. This legislation increased professional autonomy, reformulated the role of external evaluation, and emphasised the role of self-evaluation and the responsibility of individual schools with regard to assuring the quality of their work.

The school inspection service became less significant with regard to the quality evaluation of a school. In 1996, through the School Inspection Act, a new school inspection service was established, whose work is limited to checking that the work of schools complies fully with legislation, and to handling any reported violations. This means that the school inspectorate is no longer an institution dealing in a comprehensive manner with the issue of the quality of work of individual schools. Advisory work – previously performed also by school inspectors - has either remained within the competence of existing public institutions such as the National Educational Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (NEI RS) or has become the responsibility of newly established public institutions which provide professional support for schools (Slovenian Institute of Adult Education (SI AE), Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training CRS VET).

At the same time Slovenia started to establish **the external assessment of knowledge** as a mechanism which enables pupils, teachers, parents and schools to compare their results with those achieved on the national level. In 1991, the so-called external assessment of knowledge was introduced at the end of primary school for two subjects. In 1995, an external *matura* (baccalaureate) was also introduced for pupils who complete general four-year programmes. This year (2003), a vocational *matura* (baccalaureate) is also being introduced at the level of vocational education. The National Examination Centre (NEC) (in Slovenian previously RIC and now DIC) was established in 1993 to deal exclusively with the external assessment of knowledge.

School legislation also outlines – in a different way from before – the tasks of teachers or individual bodies in schools regarding **internal evaluation**. In addition to greater professional autonomy for teachers in educational work, it must be emphasised that school heads have a key role in the internal evaluation of schools – or, to be more exact, in the internal supervision of schools. The important role played by **school heads** in the entire system led to the establishment of a system of additional training for school heads and a special institution (the School for School heads) which trains school heads to perform their specific tasks, primarily in the area of management. The additional training provided by this institution is a legal requirement for attaining the post and for performing the functions of a school head.

School inspection is oriented towards *monitoring legality*, while the internal evaluation of schools, if it restricts itself to the obligations laid down by law, is geared more towards *operational monitoring* than towards actual evaluation of quality. For this reason, soon after the entry into force of new school legislation, projects began to appear which were oriented towards **comprehensive evaluation of the quality of work of individual schools**, and which can be classified within the framework of joint evaluation (a school works and reaches conclusions together with external support). Three projects should be mentioned: Network of Learning Schools (*Mreža učečih se šol*, conducted by School for School heads), Mirror

(*Ogledalo*, conducted by NEIRS) and Quality Assessment and Assurance in Education (*Ugotavljanje in zagotavljanje kakovosti v vzgoji in izobraževanju*, started by the ministry itself and run by groups of researchers in collaboration with NEIRS, SSH, CRS VET, SIAE, NEC, etc.).

The project Quality Assessment and Assurance in Education – begun in 1999 and still in its trial phase – arose as a consequence of the experiences gained from the other two projects.

This project is designed on the national level, includes a variety of instruments (combinations of data which schools already have or which they can obtain, questionnaires and other methods), and will in its final phase cover all levels and all types of educational institutions. The goal is not merely evaluation in the sense of assessment of quality; rather the project incorporates incentives for schools to move away from determination of their strengths and weaknesses and towards quality assurance. The approach is founded on a voluntary principle, and schools themselves choose to participate in the project based on their own judgement. The goal of the project is not to select schools according to quality, but instead to encourage schools to develop a culture of constantly seeking ways to improve or maintain the quality of work and results.

This indicates that a government interest in the quality of education existed in the previous decade. This still exists.

At the ministry itself, and within different public and, for the most part, state funded institutions like the National Educational Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the School for School Heads, etc., there is awareness of the current international interest in this field. They also work in this field within certain international projects or have contacts with foreign experts and use them as a professional help.

1.2. Is the issue of the particular definition of “quality” well developed in the discourse? Does it include issues of EDC?

The projects mentioned above were oriented towards comprehensive evaluation of the quality of work of individual schools which can be classified not only within « quality in education» but also within the framework of “quality assurance”.

But the notion of quality still carries a variety of meanings and is not linked – at least not by the general public – with a particular existing project or with a school evaluation or with quality assurance systems.

The public debate about « quality » in education was largely shaped by the controversy over two seemingly contradictory educational philosophies: « quality in education » denoted either everything that indicated a permissive approach (progressive education) or everything that was connected with an external assessment (and outcomes).

It is worth mentioning that a national evaluation of *systemic solutions* introduced by the curricular reform is currently underway in Slovenia and this also shapes a discourse on “quality” in education. The evaluation is led by the National Evaluation Commission. Several research projects have been carried out, and the first results are appearing. This process will shape the very notion and question of “quality” in education in the next few years. This process is completely separate from the systems of evaluation and quality assurance.

Why is the notion of quality not linked with the philosophy of « quality assurance » in the public discourse - especially in comparison to its much more frequent use in the economy? Because the project Quality Assessment and Assurance in Education which started with that intention in the period from 2000-2002 didn't gain enough support at ministerial level and therefore has not been widely implemented in schools. Another question is whether it has potential to enter public discourse and bring its philosophy with it because it is oriented mainly towards schools themselves (internally) and even if fully implemented will probably not produce immediately visible outcomes (results) from the point of view of parents and general public.

1.3. Is there interest in building this approach into the actual processes of educational reform? Are there any actual steps being taken to that end?

The previous answer addressed this question, too. The school legislation which has been carried out imposed different tasks with regard to quality from particular entities in the system and inside an individual school.

2. Current interest in QA systems in education in Slovenia

2.1. Is there any evidence of government interest in QA systems in regard to schools in your country? What form did it take? Is it systemic in approach? What stage is it at? Does it appear in any policy papers?

The result of the educational reform is that the development of evaluation systems and quality assurance in the public school system in Slovenia is not based on a single system. A diverse network is emerging. The intention is not to have one single mechanism covering all schools and providing evaluation, answers and possible solutions for improving quality. School inspection, the goal of which is supervision, operates in an autonomous manner within its statutory frameworks. Internal evaluation, the frameworks for which are laid down by law, is completely decentralised as a system, and at implementation level is left entirely in the hands of autonomous schools. In addition, there are also the above-mentioned, autonomously operating projects of "joint evaluation", which amongst other things also exploit the opportunities for interpretation provided by the existence of external assessment.

Three above mentioned projects largely fall within the above definition of QA systems: Network of Learning Schools, Mirror, and Quality Assessment and Assurance in Education (QA AE). The first two appeared in 1997, the initial phase of the third one started in 1999. The first two were supported and in part financed by the ministry of education and the third was also led by the ministry in its initial steps. It could be said that the school policy in the first years after the adoption of the school legislation only stimulated quality assurance systems to emerge but then it started to build one systematically and was very involved in its conceptual phase.

Indicators for the *Mirror* and the *QA AE* projects were discussed and determined at the national meetings of school heads organized by the ministry of education (in 1998 and in 1999 respectively). They were agreed in taking "a consensual process of debate" about educational goals and curriculum led by government – in both cases. (Two different sets of indicators were developed in two successive years and accepted.)

The Network of Learning Schools each year involves about 15 institutions from kindergarten to upper-secondary schools in the project.

The QAAE project has, from 2000 until now, not been managed and co-ordinated at national level. The result is that a once unified project diversified and to a certain extent disintegrated. The group which worked at the level of preschool education this year conducted the first empirical testing of the instrument on approximately 20 kindergartens (without ICT support at the national level). The primary and secondary education project hasn't gone further than making up questionnaires. They are now prepared for the first empirical testing in schools. One of the problems has been that any serious attempt at that level requires ICT support at national level, plus a lot of dedicated people from public institutions (like National Educational Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, etc.) and some additional financial resources which have not been secured. In the previous two years the adult education project went further but conceptually in a different direction. The Slovenian Institute of Adult Education (SIAE), as a leading external support institution, developed indicators out of the common set of indicators (agreed for primary and secondary education) but accepted the decision that no uniform instrument (like questionnaires, etc.) will be developed. Instead, each institution had to develop its own instrument in collaboration with experts of SIAE. SIAE provided a methodologist and some other expert support. The duration of a project for an institution is two years. In the first year the instrument is developed and implemented (evaluation phase) and in the second year the "quality assurance" phase of the project starts. In the year 2001/2002 four secondary schools (which teach adults) were engaged and in the year 2002/2003 additional four secondary schools and 6 "peoples universities", 14 altogether. This year SIAE has found that developing completely separate instruments for each school is not very promising and they have accepted a decision to provide the instrument at a national level.

When the minister responsible took his post, in his introductory speech to parliament he declared "quality assurance" to be one of the goals of the ministry. In July 2003, a National commission for quality was nominated which will lead and co-ordinate the whole project in the future.

2.2. Does the interest/statements contained in policy papers represent a developed understanding of the power and utility of a QA approach? Is it sensitive to the difficulties involved? Does it reveal an understanding of the QC/QA dichotomy? Does it reflect an awareness of the problems involved in developing such an approach?

Yes.

2.3. Apart from issues of interest in a complete QA systemic approach, is there any evidence of government interest in any of the particular elements listed in the introduction? (For example, the development of a National Assessment agency, or the reform of a National Inspectorate, or the commissioning of researchers to work in this field?) What form does this interest take? Is it explicitly linked to QA? Could it be so linked? Are any actual developments taking place?

The NAA has been established, a school inspection has been reformed (see 1.a.). The actual developments are explained in 2.a.

There were other initiatives from abroad – for example the idea to introduce a project based on the philosophy of ISO standards last year (2002). These were not supported by the ministry.

2.4. Is there any significant evidence of expressed interest amongst schools/school principals/ teachers associations? What form does it take? Does it appear in any publications? Is there any “network” operating? Is government aware of such interest? Are they supporting/encouraging it? How?

When the principals discussed the project in the years 1999 and 2000 at their annual meetings they accepted and supported the QAAE project. But since the project did not enter the schools, research among teachers conducted last year revealed that it is almost unknown for teachers as a coherent educational philosophy. On the other hand the questionnaires were published as a contribution to discussion and in the absence of other instruments for evaluating the quality of their work schools and teachers have started to use them – although they were not empirically tested and their validity, etc., is still questionable. In the previous year some parts of them were used for the purposes of evaluation of systemic solutions within the reform. This is also a very dubious decision (of the NEIRS) – because the fundamental premises of the project are the voluntary principle and self-evaluation, and the same questionnaires (even if adjusted) are/will be used for two completely different purposes. This may prove controversial for teachers in regard to the QAAE project.

School for School Heads, with its project of Networks, each year creates networks of schools but their collaboration in the following years (when the network is no longer managed by the SSH) declines. It could be said that there are seeds but in need of water –more organized support from the state at different levels.

2.5. Are there any academics in your country publishing in this field? What is their area of interest? What are they saying?

Yes, there are academics who are engaged in “quality assurance” and they also publish in this field. In publications, two approaches were discussed and argued: experts from the School for School Heads rely on Fullan and his concepts, and the other group of experts (who developed QAAE project at its initial stages) support more diversified approaches. They put stress on the “quality assurance” part of the whole process of improving the quality of a school’s work, but rely on more sophisticated instruments for the evaluation of school’s performance. This is not a deep controversy –experts of the SSH also helped to develop the instruments for the QAAE project.

2.6. Are there any NGO’s working in the field to develop interest in/skills in QA? Do any NGO’s presently interested in EDC fall into that category?

To my knowledge only the project Step by Step, which is supported by the OSI and conducted by the National Institute for Education might be relevant in this context. It is focused on Roma education; one of the important aims is fighting prejudices, etc. Indeed, this project is oriented to the work of teachers and not schools (which is its major weak point since individual teachers can hardly make changes in an otherwise unsupportive environment).

3. Empowerment and devolved responsibility

3.1. Are there any national statements of policy, setting out intentions to devolve responsibility/decision making to schools?

3.2. Have there actually been developments in this field? How are schools reacting? Have the results been evaluated?

3.3. How far do these developments extend? To hiring staff, changing timetables, choosing books, buying in In Service training (IST) or consultancy support? Managing budgets? Flexibility in curriculum provision? Local involvement in selection of Principals?

3.4. Are there arrangements for local governance? Involvement of local people outside school? What decision-making powers are devolved to this local body? Is there student/parent involvement? School development planning?

3.5. Are there local sources for fund generation for school development? Who is responsible? Who manages funds so raised? What accountability for their use exists?

Such changes have already been incorporated in school legislation. For example, if we compare Standaert's suggestions for changes in the tasks of school inspection, on the one hand we find that in Slovenia many changes which Standaerts suggests in *Inspectorates of Education in Europe* have already been carried out. There is a system of institutions – completely separate from school inspection - that perform tasks such as the development of national curricula, that conduct external assessment of knowledge and carry out advisory work for schools. Slovenia has devolved responsibilities for appointing head teachers and teachers to the local level, devolved responsibility for running a school primarily to head teachers and has radically reformed school inspection. In other words, a school principal decides on hiring staff, a school decides on its timetable, teachers decide on textbooks, a head teacher and teachers together decide on IST. The budget is not flexible for the most part, but there is some room for independent decisions by the head teacher, and schools can establish school funds entirely free from state control. The curriculum is not open to change (in comparison with the Swedish system introduced in the nineties) but teachers have professional autonomy as to how they will reach curriculum goals and standards of knowledge - and in reality they are almost completely free to choose what they will do when they are in their classrooms because they don't have to bear in mind what a school inspector might expect to them to do. There are no externally established sets of indicators or standards for their performance in the classroom. On the other hand, therefore, school inspection in Slovenia does not have an advisory role and expert quality control of a school's work, as Standaerts recommends.

According to *Article 48 of Organization and Financing of Education Act (OFEA)*, the local community (municipality) has its representatives on a **school council** that appoints a school head, but its power is limited: it has 3 votes out of 11, teachers have 5, and parents 3. In reality, teachers – if they are united – can very easily appoint their own principals because they need only one additional vote. It is true that the minister of education has to agree with and approve the decision of a school council but the practice until now has been that lawfully appointed school heads have always been approved. According to *Article 66 (OFEA)*, in each public pre-school institution or school, a **council of parents** shall be formed to represent parents' interests in an organized manner. Councils of parents shall be composed of one representative from each class elected by the parents at their meetings.

3.6. Are your respondents able to describe a pattern to local practices in school management and how they are developing? What accounts do they give of how such developments are perceived and how they are progressing? Is there evidence of the emergence of participative styles within a school?

The situation has changed a lot in the last decade but in practice there exists a mixture of “everything”. There are principals – especially those a year or two before their retirement – who won’t change their habits because no one can force them to do so. These will soon have left the system. There are others who manage schools very well and with a participative style. The need for a university degree as a condition of applying for the job of school principal, and the examination for principals in a School for School Heads as a compulsory component of the legal conditions for the appointment for school heads, has in the last three years gradually changed the structure of those who run schools. Since 2000, all newly appointed school heads at least know the principles of participative management. It might be estimated that in 2003, at least 70% of the whole number will have been appointed according to the aforementioned requirements. Of course, this does not necessarily imply that they actually run schools in a participative manner.

If the majority of teachers in a particular school is not able to accept different styles of conduct from individual teachers as newcomers the faculty are helpless. But it is not only the question of how schools are managed - sometimes also principals have enormous difficulties in changing patterns. Such change requires years of constant effort and some schools are only at the beginning of the process – so it is impossible to give an accurate account of the state of affairs. A long term approach is needed and that should be taken into consideration with regard to “quality assurance”.

3.7. Is there evidence of staff accepting “corporate” responsibility for school performance/planning? Are there whole-staff meetings in schools? What kind of matters do they deal with?

By law, the school head and the school advisory service cooperates with the teachers (and school management) in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of school development and the performance of educational work. In its advisory service, each school has one or (in larger schools) more experts who are by their education background psychologists, pedagogues, social pedagogues, etc.

The law determines a number of professional bodies responsible for evaluation/ performance/planning. These are: class mentor, teachers' assembly, class teachers' assembly and professional working groups. The teachers' assembly consists of the professional staff members of a school. The class teachers' assembly consists of the professional staff members engaged in educational work with an individual class. Professional working groups in a school consist of the teachers or lecturers in the same subject, or subject areas. They deal with the usual problems that emerge during the school year (assessment, curriculum matters, pedagogical problems, etc.).

The law also stipulates other bodies responsible for (internal) evaluation: parents' council and school council.

Teachers work in teams, they are educated to work in teams, but that does not mean that they do so in the same way as in Scandinavian countries (Sweden) or that they cooperate very much over their daily lessons. A further step towards team work would require a major change in the system.

It is obvious that schools and teachers work as corporate bodies. Different tasks they perform outside their work in the classroom (and not connected with the evaluation of work) also show that the staff accept “corporate” responsibility for school performance. The possible exceptions are those schools where the school head her/himself functions as a disintegrating factor in the school team but that is certainly not the case in the majority of schools. (It is probably unavoidable that there will always be some schools where teachers, because of poor management, mind only their own business and even that not very enthusiastically).

The question with regard to self-evaluation and quality assurance is not so much whether there is corporate responsibility for school performance - which does exist and can be directed to very different tasks and used for various purposes - as whether there is a real willingness to accept a principle of “hard” evaluation, an objectified “mirror”, that measures individual and corporate results of work.

3.8. Would current practices in schools (related to the role of the teacher as a member of a larger body – the school staff) present obstacles to such developments? Would teachers’ contracts and current work practices allow staff to develop corporate work practices?

Teachers’ contracts and current work practices allow staff to develop corporate work practices – they allow the quality assurance approach. But any change that required a teacher to stay in a school a few hours more each day would not be easily accepted.

3.9. How far are schools free to develop good practice or take initiatives in matters of management/curriculum/teaching and learning/ assessment?

Teachers have professional autonomy and in fact they are almost absolutely free as to how they teach to reach the required standards of knowledge. They are free to develop good practice.

One could even speculate that system solutions should protect pupils’ rights more seriously with regard to the work of teachers in the classroom. The law assigns to the school head, who is also the educational head of the school, primary responsibility for management decisions and for the implementation of internal evaluation. Because the school inspectors don’t have any right to enter the classroom and supervise the work of a teacher, one of the most important statutory duties of school heads is the substantive evaluation of lessons (although the details of its implementation are not specified by primary and secondary legislation, e.g. principal's observations of lessons, the action to be taken in the event of possible deficiencies – visits to classes; documentation of these activities varies from school to school, etc.). But this is not carried out – one school inspectorate estimates that only 40% of school heads have plans and actually supervise lessons.

School heads have limited powers in relation to the whole school budget - 85-90% or even more of it is relatively fixed. But they are the educational heads: they are able to have a decisive influence over the ethos of the school, they are responsible for hiring staff and are in a position to stimulate, or not, professional development, etc.

Curriculum matters and assessment methods are relatively strongly regulated at a national level.

4. “Self improving schools”

4.1. Are your respondents able to give you accounts of any evidence of schools adopting a “self improving/self evaluation school” approach? What form does it take? How widespread is it? Is government interested/involved?

It is clear that a large number of educational institutions are prepared and very willing to adopt a “self improving/self evaluation school” approach. In the last two years the obstacle has been not schools but state policy. When they accept the approach, that will influence others. Without clear government support it is impossible to launch such projects on a large scale. Now that support exists.

Figures for the year 2003 - QAAE project : 20 preschool institutions and 14 adult education institutions were engaged. NLS project: about 15 schools were engaged. Next year (2003/2004) from 20 to 50 additional primary and secondary schools will be engaged in the QAAE project.

4.2. Is there a consciousness/awareness in government or amongst schools of the importance of issues of school “ethos” or “school culture”? What form does this take?

Training in a School for School Heads partially has that aim. Democratic processes at various levels- the care for IST of teachers, creating “a vision of a school”, etc., - are well known approaches which are applied. What the quality evaluation and quality assurance approach can add to that is to introduce a principle of transparency of work at all levels and to give due weight to quality of work in a classroom.

5. Training and consultancy support for schools

5.1. What are the arrangements for in-service teacher training in your country? What kind of institutions are involved? How effective are they in determining and responding to the needs of schools?

5.2. To what extent can schools make specific requests for help to institutions or the system? What are the different perceptions of how well these are met? Are there accounts of institutional or procedural difficulties?

5.3. Are there other, non institutional providers? (NGOs, Independent consultants?)

5.4. Are there arrangements for the provision of training and support to school principals which could be used to support a QA approach?

5.5. Is there experience in QA amongst current providers of Teacher Training(TT)?

Education policy systematically encouraged in-service training of teachers (IST). There are many different programmes offered and schools are encouraged to spend certain amounts of money for that purpose. Teachers have a right to spend 5 working days on IST in each school year. The officially approved programs are published each year in the *Catalogue of In-Service Teacher Training*. This allows easy access to information for teachers and schools heads. Teachers themselves – with the consent of a principal – choose what programme they will attend.

A lot of advisory work has been done in so-called “study groups” of teachers. They are co-ordinated and supported by public advisory institutions (NEIRS, CRSVET, SIAE). They include virtually all the teachers of a particular subject. The state uses this mechanism to train teachers in desired topics.

Market forces work in the field of IST courses and there are all kinds of providers (including NGOs,). Market mechanisms and free choice, combined with state financial and expert support, quite successfully meet the needs of teachers and the state educational policy. Although the market is regulated via the Catalogue of approved programmes and is partly dependent on state educational policy, it allows all kinds of courses, including variations in quality. Decisions (for good and bad), however, are in the hands of teachers and principals. Together these mechanisms are quite effective. Problems emerge in fields where there is not enough expert knowledge or human resources in Slovenia. Sometimes it is impossible to change such a state of affairs overnight.

As far as the „quality assurance approach“ is concerned the state has established mechanisms for introducing a “self improving/self evaluation school” approach if it decides to do so.

5.6. Is there also expertise in EDC in TT providers?

Yes.

5.7. How are formal TT providers presently funded?

Programmes for university degrees are in part state financed; tuition fees may be partly paid by schools.

6. School development planning

6.1. Is there any evidence of a formal system of school development planning in the school system? If so, who is responsible for the generation of school plans? How are they to be produced? Who approves them? How are they resourced? How is the process supported? Is there any understanding of potential links to QA?

The school head has primary responsibility for school development planning. The law requires that each school has an annual work plan. It is usually prepared by the school head or his/her assistant (deputy) and in many cases the school advisory service cooperates with them. They have to at least discuss the annual work plan at the teachers' assembly or assemblies. It is approved by the school council.

There is a law stipulating that teachers and school management have to collaborate in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of school development and the performance of educational work.

Teachers must perform a number of tasks through which the school head or the school management (i.e. the school advisory service and/or the school head's assistant) monitors or evaluates the quality of their work (*dnevnik* – the class log book, reports to the school head, report on the annual work plan). It is their duty, laid down by law, and secondary legislation, and internal school acts or rules.

The legal framework exists for development planning, but since it is up to a school how it organizes itself, a variety of practices exist. In general – with exceptions - probably of those who have been engaged in self-evaluation projects - the annual school work plan is not prepared as a result of ongoing and comprehensive self-evaluation. The school head has the primary impact on how this is carried out and he/she can direct it towards very formal annual planning. This is precisely the point where the QAAE project intends to bring in a general change to the system.

6.2.If there is no evidence of a formal system, are you able to detect signs of less formal, less developed, general interest in such an approach?

6.3.Is there any evidence of the availability of a national or locally developed school performance evaluative instrument which could support such an approach?

The QAAE project, which has been already briefly described.

The instruments and procedures of QAAE were conceived as an element of change and development in schools and the whole system.

The model prepared for quality assessment and assurance was subdivided into six fields, the quality of each being assessed:

1. Achievement of the goals of the curriculum
2. Lessons
3. Pupils
4. Teachers
5. School, parents and local community
6. Management.

Each field consists of a number of rounded up units called sub-fields of QAA, providing a snapshot of the situation. The model is further subdivided into a presentation of quality assessment indicators.

Schools players acquire data through the use of questionnaires, assessment scales and other instruments. This supposes that only by collecting a large volume of data, and by collating and interpreting such data, is it possible to establish a quality indicator as an assessment instrument, enabling the selection and application of quality assurance mechanisms This is the main reason for establishing this model.

During the years 1999 and 2000, the Ministry of Education has encouraged discussion of the project with public institutions responsible for monitoring the operation of the education system and for designing proposals for changes.

Discussion of the nationally promoted and prepared QAAE project was motivated by:

- a) a desire to enhance the mechanisms for the establishment of a renewed educational system – a desire for multi-layered monitoring of the introduction of changes and for improvements to existing tried and tested solutions
- b) the already initiated and gradually established practices of quality assessment introduced by the School for School Heads and NEIRS (National Education Institute of RS - *Zavod RS za šolstvo*), which initiated additional consideration of evaluation elements
- c) the fact that quality assessment and assurance is spreading throughout Slovenia
- d) quality assessment in the manufacturing sector – ISO standards,
- e) the beginning of quality assessment in the area of higher education (primarily due to pressure from the process of the European integration of the higher education system)
- f) the desire to maintain the internal dynamics of the education system.

Preparation of the instrument and course of debate

Experts – as was the case throughout the decade of enhancing the education system – approached the formulation of proposals for the design of QAAE instruments and methods by collecting data on models and instruments used for the same purpose in other countries.

Documents on quality assessment or assurance were thus obtained from Scotland, USA, Spain, Austria, EU, OECD, New Zealand, etc. In addition, a selection of professional literature was consulted while preparing the proposal for QAAE instruments and procedures.

The overall preparation of instruments also took into account professional studies, as well as the achievements and problems arising during the implementation of the quality assurance or quality control system in higher education.

A 16-member working group, consisting of representatives of all public institutions, schools, universities and the ministry, discussed the first drafts of the proposed QAAE with representatives of the association of primary and secondary school principals.

This consultation was followed by discussions concerning the proposed approach to QAAE at the annual meetings of school heads in November 1999 – first for primary and then for secondary and nursery schools. Approximately six months later, a supplemented and adjusted set of instruments and approaches to QAAE was also discussed at a national meeting for the adult education sector.

Assistant principals and representatives of local communities also participate in national meetings of principals.

Work at these meetings takes place in both plenary sessions – the presentation of the concept – and in working groups – discussion of the concept and formulation of proposals for supplements.

After requesting consolidation of elements of QAAE to ensure the pre-eminence of self-evaluation in the system and the maintenance of autonomy in this area, the principals who participated in the discussion supported the proposed model. During the discussion, representatives of municipalities also supported the implementation of the QAAE system.

Principals have also discussed the proposed QAAE with their staff. They have more or less successfully performed their tasks, at least in those schools that applied for the trial application of instruments and approaches to QAAE in 2000.

Discussion, at meetings as well as in schools, has been dominated by the philosophy of using combined mechanisms and instruments of QAAE. Self-evaluation, for which schools and nursery schools use the results obtained from external assessment, internal assessment, the monitoring of data on education by teachers and questionnaires for teachers, pupils and parents, has become established as the central form of evaluation, at least for the initial period. The idea of the overall model as a two-stage model – quality assessment and assurance – essentially oriented towards quality assurance, was also supported.

With regard to the subject of evaluation, this focuses on the players within the education field: teachers and principals, pupils, parents.

Discussion of the possible model of evaluation paid particular attention to the possible reduction of the working autonomy of schools and to indirect or direct supervision:

- a) by school management of the work of teachers and other school staff members

- b) by the ministry of the work of schools.

At the same time, the prevailing view was that it is necessary to prepare a set of instruments which will enable schools, teachers and parents to systematically assess quality elements and which will form the basis for quality assurance. Quality assessment and assurance should also operate as an autonomous but complementary part of the normal monitoring and evaluation of reform in education.

Two issues were particularly prominent in the discussion:

- a) the issue of rationalisation of data collection;
- b) the issue of determining the procedures for preventing access to the data collected by administrative bodies, who, on the basis of such data, could reward or penalise the work of teachers or school management.

The question of transition from collected data to quality indicators was also discussed. Here, the issue of quality criteria is particularly prominent. The system envisages the use of a combination of data concerning the achievements of pupils and teachers, compared to achievements within the education system as a whole in Slovenia, and, on the other hand, the use of sets of assessment tools for the quality of work and working conditions in the educational process.

Assessment of the quality of education remains in the hands of teachers, school management and parents. In formulating assessments, they will receive help in the form of comments on examples of quality assessment, and in the form of direct advice regarding the preparation of quality assessment and the preparation of proposals for quality assurance.

6.4. What support is (could) be available to schools in the task of acquiring the skills to develop such an approach?

For the year 2003/2004, the instrument has now been prepared for empirical testing in Primary and Secondary Schools. As mentioned earlier, a National Commission for Quality in Education was established in July 2003. This will co-ordinate the project at all levels, with the collaboration of public advisory institutions and expert groups.

6.5. Is there any evidence of individual schools, or networks of schools, using such an approach? How is it approached? How widespread is it?

Already answered.

7. National/international benchmarks and assessment processes.

7.1. Are there arrangements for a national assessment and certification process in your country? Are there arrangements for any form of national testing?

The so-called external assessment of knowledge, at the end of the eighth year of compulsory schooling, for two subjects, introduced in 1991, is now, in 2003, being replaced by the "national assessment of knowledge" at the end of the third, sixth and ninth years of nine year compulsory school. After the 3rd and 9th years testing has been introduced, at the end of the 6th year it will be introduced when the first cohort reaches sixth year.

An external *matura* (baccalaureate) was introduced in 1995 for pupils who complete general four-year programmes.

The vocational *matura* (baccalaureate) is being introduced at the level of vocational education this year (2003).

The National Examination Centre (NEC) deals exclusively with the external assessment of knowledge.

7.2. What areas of the curriculum do these cover? Do they include EDC or any related area? What stages of schooling are involved?

The national assessment of knowledge: after 3rd year testing of math and literacy; after 6th year the same; after 9th year mathematics, mother tongue and one compulsory optional subject (this can not be citizenship education although it exists in the curriculum).

The external *matura* (baccalaureate), after general four-year programmes, includes, besides core curriculum subjects, subjects such as sociology, philosophy, etc.

The vocational *matura* (baccalaureate) includes social sciences.

7.3. Are the results of this testing available to schools in a form which could assist their evaluation of quality performance and their development planning?

The external assessment of knowledge - at all levels there is a mechanism which enables pupils, teachers, parents and schools to compare their results with those achieved at national level. For the QAAE project statistical processing of results will be reconsidered.

7.4. Is there a danger that the assessment of only a sub-set of curriculum goals could distort the balance of curriculum goals in practice?

That is not just a danger, it has already happened.

8. National Inspectorate

8.1. Is there a national inspectorate? What is its current role? What do respondents describe as its strengths and its weaknesses?

Yes – The Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Education and Sport (IRSES). The 1996 School Inspection Act separated the supervisory role in school management from the advisory and development roles.

The main general objectives of school inspection are *to ensure compliance with the law* in education (also to protect the rights of children, professional staff members and parents, and to ensure the professional autonomy of professional staff members).

School inspection, therefore, has a limited advisory and developmental role, and its preventive role and its impact on the quality of work in schools have been restricted.

The *school head* is the person to whom inspectors submit their questions (and who represents the link between internal and external evaluation). Teachers don't have to worry about the school inspection, provided they comply in their work with the legally defined solutions, in assessment of knowledge, for example.

Basically, a school inspection has *a supervisory function*. Its field of operation is the supervision of the implementation of laws and other regulations governing:

- organisation,
- the appropriate use of public funds, and
- the performance of educational activities.

If an inspector does not have the special professional knowledge necessary to determine or assess some issue during supervision, evidence is provided by an expert.

The evidence *must be sought from an education expert* if the facts and circumstances of the case allow the conclusion that:

- the right of children and other participants in education (students) to achieve prescribed knowledge standards, enabling them to advance to or enrol in education on the next level, is being violated,
- the right of professional staff members to work autonomously is being violated or,
- professional staff members do not ensure objectivity, criticism and pluralism in their educational work.

The first point above, regarding the violation of rights of students, indicates that the task of inspection involves not only supervision, but also extends to areas of teaching where experts have to deal with "substantive" quality issues. However, even here the law does not discuss evaluation of the quality of work; these more substantive inspections take place when a complaint has been made or when violations of rights have been reported. In a sense, an expert has to make a simple decision: was there a violation of a right - yes or no.

Once again, the law stipulates that an *inšpektor* (inspector) may not be present during the educational process without the consent of the school head. *Izvedenci za pedagoško področje* (education experts) can be present during the educational process with the consent of the *glavni inšpektor* (chief inspector). However, *when present* during the educational process, *inspectors or experts are not allowed to advise teachers or educators, or to disturb the educational process in any other manner.*

8.2. Do they have international links to SICI?

No. It is a small inspectorate and overloaded with work. They (the chief inspector and others) were encouraged to establish links, they made some visits etc., but they – in part wrongly - perceive themselves as being an institution very different from other school inspectorates and therefore they think SICI can not be of any help.

8.3. Is there a perception of professional/public confidence in the skills/approach/independence of the Inspectorate?

It is mostly "invisible" to teachers. Only the school heads are really aware of its existence. In general, they don't have difficulties with the quality of inspectors. They are a part of the ministry but independent.

8.4. Are they independent? Do they publish a “State of the Nation” report (annually/biannually/etc)?

The inspectorate is autonomous in its work; it reports to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport when required, prepares the annual work plan and submits it for approval, and, at least once a year, prepares and submits to the minister a report on its work which must contain:

- data on the number of inspections conducted in individual schools,
- data on violations detected and measures taken, as well as on the implementation of the measures taken. They must also provide a general evaluation of the situation in terms of compliance with the law and the protection of the rights of children and other participants in education, and of professional staff members in schools.

8.5. Is the inspectorate presently aware of/ involved in issues of QA nationally?

Yes, it is aware, but not directly involved. The idea is that the legal supervision of the work of schools has to be separated from their own internal quality evaluation and quality assurance.

8.6. Is there a formal public statement of quality indicators used by inspectors? Are these related to national educational goals, standards and definitions of quality? What is their status? (Incorporated within a law on education, set out in an official government paper, or offered as guidance for schools and teachers?)

No, there is no formal public statement of quality indicators used by inspectors.

Since inspection is primarily concerned with ensuring that schools comply with the legislation in force, inspectors and experts base their work on parameters laid down by the provisions of primary and secondary *legislation*. Where stipulated by secondary legislation (for example, the norm for "the number of pupils per class", school premises regulations, etc.), inspectors and experts base their work on such standards of proficiency.

Particularly in the event of supervision by education experts, who deal primarily with questions of implementation of the curriculum and of lessons, inspection evaluations are based on standards set by individual scientific disciplines or professions. In general, inspection, together with its areas of supervision, must observe basic parameters of evaluation laid down by law. Therefore, the Inspectorate itself does not set required standards; instead it must use either standards already laid down by primary and secondary legislation or norms set by individual scientific disciplines.

Because the Inspectorate does not conduct evaluation of the quality of the work in schools, *these criteria* are not used for such evaluation of quality, but only for the evaluation of the system in terms of its compliance with the law.

Inspection findings and instructions are typically formulated as "you have violated this", followed by an instruction or request to correct the irregularity detected. Inspectors do not evaluate the level of quality achieved by a school in the individual tasks it performs.

Inspectors, for example, evaluate whether the marking rules are being violated or not and, where they find such violations, they order their removal. Experts are also not explicitly assigned by law to evaluate the quality of, for example, a certain teacher's marking, but only whether or not the teacher has committed a violation. To take another example, if parents

make a complaint concerning a teacher's conduct of lessons, the fundamental criteria according to which the education expert would judge the teacher's work are the criteria of "objectivity, criticism and pluralism" (this norm for judgment is defined in the School Inspection Act) – but the question for the expert is *whether or not* a teacher has taught his/her lessons in accordance with the above criteria, not the quality of teacher's work.

In other words, if we take the definition of criterion in the strictest sense as *criterion = parameter + required standard*, the purpose of inspection is not to deal with issues set by the other part of criterion, that is, with the evaluation of the level of "standards achieved".

This does not mean that there are no standards at all, or that inspectors should not use them. It simply means that inspections do not deal with the quality or level of standards achieved directly, instead they evaluate whether or not schools operate within the legal framework, and that is why there is no need for Slovenian school inspection to have *a set of standards or a list of indicators*.

Nevertheless, when evaluating violations of the law, inspectors and experts of course **indirectly** evaluate the quality aspect of the implementation of a process. Parameters and required standards are indirectly set out in numerous laws, secondary legislation and other documents. Inspectors have a list of what to check but that is not a list of standards and indicators.

In short, the aim of inspection is supervision of the implementation of laws and other regulations: inspections evaluate whether or not schools operate within the legal framework. Consequently, an activity is examined in relation to legislation, and not according to a set of defined parameters and standards of quality.

8.7. How public are inspection processes?

The only public information is the annual report, a synthesis report which has no names in it.

8.8. Do inspection processes include EDC?

Not directly, or as a target.

9. Curriculum and definitions of "Quality"

9.1. Is there a national body with responsibility for the national curriculum? In what form is this curriculum stated? How do teachers use it?

9.2. Are there standards, or quality indicators of any sort incorporated in the National Curriculum statements?

Expert Council RS for Education. The curriculum is extended, it defines subjects and their place in the curriculum (number of hours, etc.), and quite precisely defines aims and standards of knowledge for each subject.

9.3. Does the government have targets based on such standards for school performance? Are they national/school based?

The curriculum is a national one. The most direct mechanism for defining - and altering - the required standards of knowledge that the national educational policy has are external assessments.

9.4. Do such standards also exist for EDC?

Educational aims and standards of knowledge – yes.

10. Accountability

10.1. Are there any arrangements for accountability of schools in the present system? How formal is it? Is it public?

Schools themselves (or at least school heads) know their pupils' results and also the averages for the whole population achieved in external examinations. There are other ways to find out how the school stands in comparison to others. But almost every instrument that exists and shows the results of a particular school is oriented to inform the school, not parents or the public. The only instrument that parents and local authorities have is a report about the annual work plan, and the local authority has informal influence through finances.

There is no arrangement such as the publication of results according to a set of quality indicators or such.

10.2. On what matters are schools held accountable? Is quality of performance a factor?

In cities, where there are more schools, and especially in upper-secondary education, schools compete with each other in achievements and for pupils. But everything is informal.

The school inspection is not designed to measure the quality of work of schools. The law stipulates that it is forbidden to publish the results achieved by pupils in external examinations. Thus quality performance is a factor that concerns the teacher, the school head, the pupils and the parents. Almost everything relating to the quality of work of schools happens within that circle. Quality of performance is a factor but external pressures are very weak.

10.3. To whom do the lines of accountability extend?

10.4. What are the incentives/sanctions in the system? And how effective are they?

The key relationship is between a teacher and a school head. But at the end of the day, if a teacher constantly performs poorly, school heads have no formal mechanisms to dismiss this teacher from the service (employment) because of the poor results of his/her pupils. Unless a teacher seriously breaks the law it is impossible to remove him/her. With regard to quality, the incentive is a system of advancement for teachers, because advancements bring higher salary, but the problem is that many things other than excellent work in the classroom brings points for advancement. External encouragement for good work in the classroom is very weak.

10.5. What is the effect (likely effect) of the presence/absence of such accountability on the functioning of the system?

It allows poorly performing teachers and school heads to carry on in post unchallenged. This is particularly relevant to the teacher's classroom work.

10.6. Can other major actors (Local education Authorities/Ministry Officials/Politicians) also be held accountable? What are the mechanisms?

Local authorities are only politically accountable, with regard to schools, for their material conditions. The ministry officials are accountable to the minister, and he/she is only politically accountable.

11. The way forward

11.1. What institutions or processes external to schools would have to be created?

11.2. What are the main lines along which reforms would have to be undertaken in existing institutions other than schools? (You may wish to refer to the elements described in the introduction as a broad checklist.)

11.3. Would any new curriculum documents (with standards and targets) would have to be produced? What sort, at what stages?

11.4. What would be the most important new sets of institutions or procedures which would have to be created to make a QA system work in your country's school system?

11.5. What would be the most critical skill shortages in key players, or groups of players, which would have to be overcome if a Ministry is to develop and implement such an approach?

11.6. Who might be able to undertake to meet these shortages?

11.7. What would have to be done in order to create the capacity (if it does not already exist) to meet these shortages?

11.8. What would have to be done before all schools could develop their own school development plan? Could this procedure be usefully piloted in the field of EDC?

11.9. What kinds of support will be needed? How could that be provided?

It is hard to answer these questions, since the QAAE project has, in one way or another, solved almost all those problems. Not that everything has been done. In the last two years the key problem has been that this project was not supported at ministry level. The ministry financed research but did not launch a large scale endeavour which, in this case, would require support from public advisory institutions. In 2000, it was intended that a large scale project would gradually include every school in the country. Now the political support exists, and an institution for co-ordination has been established. In the next year it will face two major difficulties: establishing comprehensive information technology support for schools and engaging appropriate expert support for each of the schools engaged in a project for the interpretation of their evaluation results and further quality assurance solutions.

12. Conclusions and Next Steps.

The QA EDC project could be integrated into the Slovenian endeavours to improve quality assurance in education. Exactly how is hard to answer at this stage – but QAAE is a broad project and open to changes and variations. The QA EDC project will hopefully provide a locus within which to reconsider the solutions provided by the existing QAAE project, and the overall state of affairs in Slovenia in the field of evaluation and quality assurance. It may also provide an EDC instrument that will be used in the schools.