

**National Testing of Pupils
in Europe:
Objectives, Organisation and
Use of Results**

Austria

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PART I: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PUPIL ASSESSMENT

In contrast to many other European countries, national testing is a relatively new phenomenon in Austria's education system. Educational standards tests, aimed at providing a basis for monitoring and evaluating schools and the education system, were created in addition to the traditional system of continuous assessment.

In Austria, pupils at ISCED levels 1 and 2 are continuously assessed by their teachers but until very recently, Austrian schools were not subject to national testing or external evaluation. Before discussing the newly introduced standards testing in years 4 and 8, which are junctures in the Austrian school system, it is necessary to look at the traditional Austrian system of assessment at ISCED levels 1 and 2 on the basis of the following legal documents: Assessment Decree, School Education Act and School Organisation Act (see → Ref.; also cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

At *Volksschule/Grundschule* (primary school, ISCED level 1) pupils are assessed by their teachers on the basis of continuous participation in classroom activities in all subjects of instruction. In general, assessments are focused on both written performance such as school tests (in grade 4) and other written exams such as texts or dictations and on special practical performance assessments, as well as oral exercises. This assessment and also the assessment of the pupils' behaviour are spread evenly over the evaluation period. However, pupils at *Volksschule/primary school* are exempt from oral examinations, and written exams are only held in year 4 (4-6 school tests in German and Mathematics each) (cf. Assessment Decree).

At ISCED levels 1 and 2 the school year is divided into two semesters. After the first semester pupils receive a half-term report (*Schulnachricht*), and at the end of the school year they receive an end-of-year report (*Jahreszeugnis*). This document shows the name and location of the school, the pupil's personal data and grades achieved in that particular year. In addition, there are endorsements in the end-of-year report stating e.g. whether the pupil has failed or successfully completed the grade and is therefore entitled to move up to the next grade or not, or if the pupil may retake the class. In the first year the half-term report contains an overall assessment either with or without written comments. Half-term or end-of-year reports at higher grades consist of marks with or without verbal additions (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007). The following assessment grades are used to evaluate pupils' achievements: 1 (very good), 2 (good), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (sufficient) and 5 (insufficient).

All pupils in their pre-school year (if required) and in primary school years 1 and 2 are allowed to move up to the next year, regardless of how they are evaluated in the end-of-year report. Pupils in higher years of primary school are generally entitled to move on to the next higher grade unless they have been awarded a '5' in any compulsory subject. Assessments in Music, Arts, Technical and Textile Work and P.E. do not influence pupils' transfer to the next higher grade at primary level. The final decision whether a pupil should move up to the next grade lies with the staff council. Pupils who are not entitled to move up to the next grade retake the grade because primary school and special schools for children with special needs do not offer resit examinations (*Wiederholungsprüfungen*).

Apart from special schools, pupils with special educational needs are sometimes also taught in integration classes where they are supported by assistant teachers or tutors. (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

After the four-year primary school cycle, pupils move on to a four-year lower secondary level. They either attend a general secondary school (*Hauptschule*) for years 5 to 8 or an academic-track secondary school (*Gymnasium/Allgemein-bildende Höhere Schule AHS*) up to year 12. Pupils must have successfully completed year four to be admitted to general secondary school. Pupils wanting to enter an academic-track secondary school must have 'Excellent' or 'Good' grades in German language, Reading, Writing and Mathematics, or they can be admitted upon the recommendation of the teaching staff of the primary school. If a pupil fails to meet these requirements, he or she may take an entrance examination. (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

At general secondary school, performance assessments are spread evenly over the evaluation period (one semester) before pupils are assigned to one of three streams in the subjects of German, Mathematics and English. The following forms of formative and summative performance assessment are commonly used: observation of classroom participation, oral assessments (examinations and exercises), written assessments (tests, dictations), practical performance assessments and graphical performance assessments. Consideration concerning evaluation is given to special-status pupils with language deficiencies.

In general secondary school, teachers are responsible for making unbiased and fair evaluations as to independent work, acquisition and application of the subject matter, homework, and behaviour. *Behaviour at school* is evaluated by the joint teaching staff (class council) in form of a separate mark and it is not part of a grade of any subject. The class teacher (*Klassenvorstand*) may propose one of the following marks: very satisfactory, satisfactory, little satisfactory, not satisfactory. (cf. School Education Act; cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007)

Teachers consider all achievements made by the individual pupils, with the most recent performance bearing the largest weight, when evaluating performance at the end of the school-year. The end-of-year report (in year 8 including also the final report) also contains the overall-assessment that the pupil passed with distinction or success – if the corresponding requirements in the School Education Act (*Schulunterrichtsgesetz*) have been met. In addition to the end-of-term report and the end-of-year report, parents are informed as to the progress of their children at two parents' evenings and they can request individual face-to-face parent-teacher meetings.

In academic secondary schools the same forms of performance assessment are used as in general secondary schools and students are also assessed by their teachers using the same grades (1-5). Teachers are also required to inform students and parents adequately about the general evaluation policy they use for feedback and performance assessment.

After successfully completing the 4th year of general secondary school, pupils receive an end-of-year with a final report which is needed for admission to general upper secondary schools, pre-vocational schools (*Polytechnische Schule*), medium-level technical and vocational schools (*Berufsbildende mittlere Schulen*) as well as commercial schools (*Handelsakademie, Handelsschule*) and upper secondary technical or vocational colleges (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen*), academic secondary schools (years 9 to 12) or for further professional activities. At the end of the junior years (lower cycle) of academic secondary school, students only receive an end-of-year report but no final certificate because their 9-year compulsory schooling is not yet completed. Students either continue to attend further academic secondary school (years 9 to 12) or transfer to another higher school type.

Until recently there was no tradition of external assessment in the Austrian school system. In 2001 educational standards were developed and later piloted in 2003/04 and 2004-2007. The results of the pilot scheme have formed a basis for further development and baseline testing of educational standards. In 2008 the educational standards were regulated by law (SchUG 117). The first country-

wide standards tests will take place 2012 and 2013. Pupils/students in years 4 and 8 will be tested. Criticism was expressed that the standards tests are applied to the exit points or junctures of the Austrian schools system: The role of standards testing in the overall perspective of a young person's schooling is not clear yet and might lead to conflicting messages concerning the handling of test data (cf. Gruber, 2004). However, the results of standards testing are not supposed to affect pupils' grades but are intended to serve as an instrument of self-evaluation for teachers and schools.

Legislation

Leistungsbeurteilungsverordnung (Assessment Decree) (Federal Law): BGBl. No. 371/1974; last amendment BGBl. II No. 35/1997: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/gvo/lb_vo.xml (06-08-2009).

Schulorganisationsgesetz (SchOG) (School Organisation Act) (Federal Law): BGBl. No. 242/1962; last amendment BGBl. I. No. 44/2009: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/gvo/schog.xml> (03-08-2009).

Schulunterrichtsgesetz (SchUG) (School Education Act) (Federal Law): BGBl. No. 472/1986; last amendment BGBl. I No. 117/2008: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/gvo/schug.xml> (06-08-2009).

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PART II: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NATIONAL TESTING AND ITS POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Austria has never had an external assessment tradition, and until a few years ago not even a systematic evaluation of the national school system took place. Many school statistics so far have been purely descriptive rather than the result of systematic evaluation. Some recent national studies have looked at teachers' and students' sentiments or at the effects of expanded autonomy on teachers and pupils, but no real monitoring has taken place (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007). The recently introduced national tests are sample tests that are based on national educational standards. In the following the development of educational standards in Austria will be discussed.

As a result of globalisation and international competition in the context of structural and economic change, education has become more of an issue in both social and public life. Even before Austria became a member of the European Union, school and education systems were moving towards an international standard. In addition to the perceived need for greater comparability of students' performances, the results of the international comparative studies TIMSS and PISA caused doubts among Austrian students and their parents concerning the benefit and quality of education and training (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007). In addition to this, results of international performance tests merely reflect a fraction of Austria's education system. Thus, a comprehensive regular and objective monitoring of students' skills and competencies would be required in order to improve the quality of both teaching and schools (cf. bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). International performance studies have also shown that quality assurance systems focusing exclusively on input monitoring no longer meet practical requirements. As scientific studies that compare the educational systems of different countries show, countries with accountability systems for educational outcome report higher achievement (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007). These are the most important factors that have increased the readiness for reform. For

these reasons, the Austrian Ministry of Education is now placing special importance on the development and introduction of nationwide educational standards

Austria is currently undergoing a paradigm shift in education policy: the transition from input orientation to output orientation. While input orientation is concerned with the content of instruction, output orientation focuses on the expected results of pupils' learning at a specific point of time. Students' learning performance and their academic achievement is taken as a basis for orientation for further development. Output orientation gives rise to external assessments and in Austria's case the development, implementation and external testing of educational standards (cf. Altrichter & Schratz, 2004; cf. Böhler-Wüstner, 2007).

Educational standards are normative expectations, determining the lasting and effective competences pupils are supposed to have acquired in year 4 (at the age of 10) in German Reading and Writing and Mathematics and in year 8 (at the age of 14) in Mathematics, German and English (cf. bmukk, Development of Education in Austria, 2004 - 2007). Standards describe the expected learning outcome, focusing on the core areas of a subject. They also define the basic subject and interdisciplinary competences which are crucial for further education. As schools become increasingly autonomous, more and more emphasis is laid on standards to ensure comparability. Therefore, educational standards serve as a means of self-evaluation for schools and teachers.

Educational standards do not define good teaching or standardise teaching and learning and do not interfere with schools' options for autonomous development. However, standards provide guidance for schools and teachers and influence class teaching indirectly by setting a pedagogical frame of reference and by focusing on learning outcomes (quality assurance). Nevertheless, the standards cannot and must not replace pedagogical accountability for teaching, fostering, challenging and assessing (cf. bmukk, Austrian Education News, 2004).

The development of educational standards for Austrian schools began in 2001/02 with the appointment of a steering group in charge of devising and implementing the standards. The steering group consisted of representatives of the Ministry, the school administration and regional school inspectorates (compulsory schools and academic secondary schools), the scientific community and the centre for school development. When Klieme's et al. (2003) expert report 'Zur Entwicklung nationaler Bildungsstandards' [On the Development of National Educational Standards], based on the situation in Germany was published, Austria was already in the process of creating educational standards.

As far as the political framework is concerned, in 2003 school development and quality-assurance and the formulation of standards were major issues on the government's agenda. To this end, a Future Commission in charge of school reform was appointed. As documented in the reform concept by the Future Commission 'Reformkonzept der österreichischen Zukunftskommission: Strategien und Maßnahmen zur Qualitätsentwicklung' [Reform Concept by the Austrian Future Commission: Strategies and Measures for Quality Assurance] (Haider et al., 2003) a recommendation was given that schools should systematically improve by clarifying goals in conjunction with defined standards and quality indicators. Moreover, the Future Commission advocated greater autonomy and flexibility for schools, the improvement of school administration, increased professionalisation of the teaching force, and quality control and assurance through standards and system monitoring.

According to the experts (Klieme et al., 2003; Eder, 2003; Schratz, 2007), standards are based on educational goals as opposed to subject-specific goals; they describe precise foundational goals – *not all goals* – in the form of skills and desired long-term learning results rather than subject-matter knowledge that has been taught. The foundational skills should be well-grounded in research-based models of competence, describing the basic learning development in a subject (cf. Klieme et al., 2003, p. 15). They should be illustrated through assignment examples and tests that facilitate comparison among schools (cf. Altrichter & Schratz, 2004, p. 633). According to the Future Commission, standards define the goals concerning basic skills in different subjects and these must be tested on a regular basis; the monitoring of standards is required. System monitoring, which is the same process of

defining, monitoring and publishing of educational indicators should take place on school level (cf. Haider et al., 2003, p. 44). In short, these definitions describe output standards and external assessment as a way to test them.

The development of standards has to be regarded as work-in-progress. Competence models and standards have been devised focusing on the core curriculum. Sample tasks to illustrate the standards have been developed and tested in classrooms. In a parallel process, test items are being constructed and collected in item pools (cf. Lucyshyn, 2006, p. 8).

In order to work towards the implementation of these standards two pilot phases were conducted: The first one in 2003/04 involved 18 secondary schools and also integrated feedback from primary schools. On the 14th April 2004 the educational standards were the subject of a speech in the Council of Ministers (*Bildungsstandards – Ein weiterer Qualitätssprung für das österreichische Schulwesen*). The evaluation results of the first pilot phase served as input for pilot phase II in 2004-2007 in 140 schools. However, an important step for a successful implementation of the standards is the communication of their goals and strategies to the pupils, teachers and parents and the general public (cf. Lucyshyn, 2006, p. 4).

In Austria the federal government is responsible for the educational system, which affects the strategies of implementation of standards. The strategy works as a moderated top-down process with high involvement of teachers as change agents: the Ministry for Education is on the top level of this project. During the pilot phase executive and coordination units were installed on regional and school levels. During the piloting, the pilot schools reported their experiences with the standards back to the steering committees on the ministerial level and that data was used as feedback for revision and further development. In the implementation concept teachers are the agents of the reform process and have to be actively involved. Apart from giving feedback, they contribute to the development process of the standards. The principle of participation has been chosen to create a higher commitment and higher output accountability on the part of the teachers (cf. Lucyshyn, 2007, p. 575). In order to keep up that commitment, comprehensive, long-term and country-wide supportive structures and further training programmes on all levels are maintained and expanded. Different types of further training programmes such as workshops, events, conferences, etc. on different levels, e.g. for education experts teaching at teacher training institutions, for school heads and inspectors and for teachers will take place. A new publication on that topic by the BIFIE appeared in January 2009, *Konzepte zur Verankerung der Bildungsstandards in Aus- und Fortbildung* [Concepts of the Embedding of Educational Standards in Education and Further Training].

In September 2006 a new institution concerned with the increased requirements as to quality development and evaluation was founded: the BIFIE (*Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation & Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens*/Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian Educational Sector). Germany advised and supported the BIFIE in its starting phase also concerning budget planning. At present, however, experts from Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Austria cooperate in the BIFIE. Headquartered in Salzburg, the BIFIE also absorbed the former centre for school development and in 2008 it was legally empowered as a public service institution. Presently the BIFIE consists of three centres: firstly, the headquarters in Salzburg which is the centre for national and international assessments and where all international large-scale studies (PISA, PIRLS, etc.) and national school performance assessment programmes in connection with educational standards are conducted. Secondly, the centre in Graz deals with scientific projects in educational research and evaluation, especially evaluation projects concerning innovation in schools which were formerly conducted by the centre for school development. Thirdly, the centre in Vienna, which prepares measures of quality development for schools and which is concerned with devising and implementing educational standards for years 4 and 8. The BIFIE also conducts and evaluates the educational standards tests. (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

The Ministry for Education entrusted the BIFIE with the conduct of educational standards testings. While the coordination as regards contents and the realisation of the project lies with the centre for education monitoring and educational standards (BIFIE Salzburg), the centre for data-management and statistics (BIFIE Salzburg) organises the implementation of baseline-testings, the sampling procedure and the data collection and analysis. In every federal country a regional coordinator is responsible for direct contact with individual schools and support of the BIFIE as to the coordination of the standards tests and the transmission of data. Minimal expenditure for schools and an objective and standardised testing procedure are ensured by the assignment of external test leaders. (cf. BIFIE, 2009)

The implementation of the educational standards is still in its infant stages. In 2008, 5 more pilot tests for years 4 and 8 were conducted in German, Mathematics and English in the same way as in pilot phase II. In 2009 the first baseline-testing for year 8 in German, English and Mathematics was carried out by the BIFIE Salzburg. This process involved 10 to 15 % of the schools.

In 2010 the baseline-testing for year 4 will take place and also involve 10 to 15 % of the schools. For 2011 further preparations concerning the standards tests for year 8 are planned. Between 2008 and 2011 standards for sciences in year 8 will be further developed.

The BIFIE Vienna is involved in the phases of implementation, support and training between 2008 and 2011. At the same time instruments for self-evaluation for all involved subjects at primary schools as well as general and academic secondary schools will be involved. These instruments will be created in cooperation with the BIFIE Vienna for the respective levels (years 4 and 8) before the external assessment. Between 2008 and 2013 further adjustments concerning school books, curriculum, output-orientation etc. have to be made (cf. bmukk, press information, 2008).

Legislation

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PART III: AIMS AND ORGANISATION OF NATIONAL TESTING

Number of types of national testing identified: 1 (Education Standards Test)

Type of national testing number 1	Educational Standards Test (<i>Standardtestung/Testung zur Überprüfung der Bildungsstandards</i>)
ISCED level	1 and 2

1. Aims

There is a distinction between educational standards functioning as orientation and a means to foster learning through precise goals, and standards testing which has a clearly evaluative function and measures the level of skills and competences at a certain point of time. Standards tests have a summative purpose and serve as a monitoring instrument.

Educational standards help to ascertain common aims and criteria. They provide feedback on framework conditions and outcomes (strengths / weaknesses, need for development) for schools. Moreover, they check to what extent schools and teachers comply with their core responsibility of teaching those competences that are generally regarded necessary (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

Educational standards tests serve as instruments to evaluate the performance of schools, because schools are reviewed at regular intervals. Furthermore, their goal is to provide a framework for school autonomy and increase accountability by setting benchmarks (cf. Eurydice, 2006/2007).

According to § 3 Bildungsstandards-VO (BGBl. II Nr. 1/2009), the functions of the educational standards are: 1. long-term outcome-orientation in the planning and practice of teaching, 2. the best possible diagnostics for every individual pupil on the basis of precise standards of comparison and 3. a contribution to the quality development of Austrian schools (bmukk, Beschlussreifer Entwurf, 2008).

In 2008, the Ministry of Education enacted the educational standards in the School Education Law § 17 Abs. 1 BGBl. I Nr 117/2008. In the following paragraph, the explanations to this law will be summed up (cf. bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008): The first idea, outcome-orientation, explains that educational standards lay down what pupils should know by a certain point of time. Teachers have to support every individual to reach their best possible achievement. Knowing the students' level of achievement in respect to the educational standards is a prerequisite for using adequate support and remedial measures. For this purpose, teachers are provided with special tools such as sample tasks and diagnostic instruments. The second aim, focused support for students, means that teachers compare the educational standards with their students' real learning results and analyse them in order

to diagnose a student's level of proficiency. If a student has any difficulties in reaching the goals, the teacher has to foster and support him/her to in the best possible way to achieve the goals.

As far as quality development for schools is concerned, standard tests supply the school system with feedback on student skills. They support internal (within the school) and external (by the supervisory school authority) steering measures. Schools are provided with the aggregated test results and should use them to improve their quality. Measures of quality improvement may comprise: pedagogical conferences or subject teacher conferences, the elaboration of methodological-didactical concepts or professional training for teachers, exchange of ideas in networks and other activities (cf. bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008).

Teachers are not assessed by their authorities but the regular work with the results of standard testings should establish a culture of common quality assurance at a school.

2. Responsible bodies and players

The tests are designed by the BIFIE (*Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation & Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens* / Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian Educational Sector), as explained above, an institution affiliated with the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with experts and teachers.

Teacher unions and school partners are kept informed on current developments. The standards tests take place at the chosen schools and not in any special location for that purpose. Educational standards tests are so far administered by external persons. Presumably, the test administration will be carried out by teachers of a different subject who teach at the same school in the next years, but a binding decision concerning test administration is yet to be made. Teachers of the classes that took a test are not involved in the correction process – this is done by the BIFIE and teachers only receive the anonymous class results. Students, teachers and schools are not charged for taking the test but the costs are covered by the Ministry of Education (cf. bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). Baseline testings, for example, involve printing cost for 20,000 to 25,000 test booklets, costs for fieldwork (screening, regional test administration, coding, scanning and processing), external experts, scaling, statistics and printing costs for brochures and reports. Compared to the baseline testings, costs for the first standards tests will be even higher (cf. BMUKK, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18329/bifie_gesetz_novelle_mat.pdf).

3. Timing

The first compulsory regular and country-wide standards tests start in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and all schools, even grant-aided schools, will be involved and receive feedback within a cycle of three years, because educational standards tests are compulsory. The standards tests take place around the end of April or early May, according to the suggestions by the Ministry of Education. All participating schools in Austria are tested on the same day, but there are different days for different subjects (English, German, Mathematics are tested on different days). The first baseline testing took place in April and May 2009 for pupils in year 8. The selection of schools for this phase was based on the stratified random sample method. At each participating school up to three classes were tested. Participating students are listed according to their birthdays, therefore their anonymity can be guaranteed.

In the case of the first baseline testing for 8th graders the test took either twice 45 minutes (90 minutes) or three times 40 minutes (120 minutes) a day. The tests for 4th graders will last for 60 minutes each (cf. bmukk, Austrian Education News, 2004).

4. Target groups

Pupils in year 4 (at the age of 10) and year 8 (at the age of 14) have to take the standards tests.

According to prospective planning, all pupils in year 8 will be tested in mathematics in 2012, in English in 2013 and in German in 2014. Pupils in year 4 will be tested in mathematics in 2013 and in German in 2014.

Within a cycle of three years all schools will be tested and receive feedback.

Pupils with special education needs do not participate in national tests in Austria. However, process-standards were developed for SEN-pupils but they are not tested together with the national tests.

5. Subjects tested

Educational standards for year 4 (pupils at the age of 10) comprise German, Reading, Writing and Mathematics. The standards focus on the core areas of these two subjects and lasting competences in these fields that provide a basis for lifelong learning. Students in year 8 (at the age of 14) are tested in German, Mathematics and English. Educational standards and tests for the sciences for year 8 are currently being developed. Details and further specifications cannot be given in this place because the first country-wide standards test will take place in 2012.

6. Links with the curriculum and types of test questions

The Austrian curriculum at ISCED level II is divided into the core-curriculum, which accounts for two thirds of the teaching time, and the extended areas, the remaining third which is at the individual teacher's disposal and is usually used to meet the students' and teachers' special interests or the school profile. Educational standards lay down the competences in specific subjects and standards tests aim at testing skills in a particular subject.

Educational standards are constructed on the basis of a competence model which builds a bridge between abstract goal formulations in specific subjects. Competences are defined as lasting cognitive skills that can be developed by learners and enable them to perform specific tasks in variable situations, involving the willingness (dynamics and social competence) to use these skills. These competences are described in such concrete terms that it is possible to transform them into specific tasks and test them (cf. bmukk, Development of Education in Austria, 2004 – 2007; bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). The tasks of varying complexity involve a broad distribution of cognitive levels. In an ideal case items aim at the cross-linked/integrated use of competences in an appropriate process and context.

Test items for the educational standards tests have to match the rules of psychological test theory and test design. The test formats may involve short questions with closed answers, different types of multiple choice questions and questions with open answers (cf. bmukk, Vorblatt und Erläuterungen, 2008). Pupils receive different sets of questions, because there are different versions of test booklets all aimed at testing the same competences.

As far as the first baseline test is concerned, 8th graders were tested in English Reading and Writing with multiple choice format and they had to write two texts. In addition to that at some schools also speaking was tested in pairs over a time of 15 minutes. Mathematics was tested in booklets with multiple choice and open questions. German Reading and Writing as well as orthography and language awareness were tested in multiple choice and open questions.

In addition to subject questions also context questionnaires for students and school heads were used in the baseline phase and will be used in regular standards testing. The context questions for students aim at demographic variables, the students' socio-economic background and their school career. Personal questions that are not related to the standards tests have to be avoided. The background questionnaires are administered immediately after the standards test and take twenty minutes. (cf. BIFIE, 2009)

In addition to that the school questionnaires for the school heads serve as a basis for individual feedback to schools and for objective comparisons between similar schools. Important topics of the

school questionnaire are for example, basic information concerning the school (location, characteristics, legal status, etc.), remedial measures in the tested classes, offers for especially weak and gifted students and learners with a mother tongue other than German. Furthermore, personal resources (e.g. extent of employment, qualification of teachers) and general conditions influencing the learning process at school. (cf. BIFIE, 2009)

7. Use of ICT

Currently papers are used for testing but in future it might be possible to administer standards tests online. So far no plans have been made in that direction.

8. Main users

The general goal of educational standards is to establish common aims and criteria. For schools, this means, that they receive feedback on their framework conditions in order to improve them. The Ministry for Education specifies the benefit for the main users (cf. bmukk, Austrian Education News, 2004). Educational standards serve as feedback for teachers on their assessment criteria, ascertainment of common aims, and as an impetus for targeted remedial teaching in order to guarantee the set levels of attainment and as an impulse for improved diagnostics. Teachers are also guaranteed free scope for action in terms of school development and teaching, and especially in terms of designing in-school learning plans. Another aim concerning teachers is that they will learn from experience and feedback. As far as students are concerned, educational standards help them to increase their self-assessment skills and provide a better basis for remedial measures. The students' motivation for self-directed learning is also expected to improve. Moreover, the results of standards tests do not affect students' grades and the results of standards tests are not used to assess teachers or schools or use them in rankings. To sum up, the emphasis lies on the internal use rather than on the external use of educational standards. (cf. bmukk, Austrian Education News, 2004)

9. Reporting test results

After the pilot phase the students received their individual test results, while teachers got the anonymous results of their classes. The results were only available to school management and school administration in an aggregated form, which means that the school heads got the results of their school but not of their individual classes. However, as the feedback of school heads and teachers showed for quality development and assurance more detailed data is required. The final mode of reporting test results is still under discussion.

10. Reforms

The creation of educational standards in Austria and the development of standards tests is still work-in-progress and currently being implemented, this process could be perceived as a reform of Austria's educational sector.

USES OF NATIONAL TEST RESULTS

The results of standards tests do not influence students' grades neither are they used as instruments of selection. These tests rather provide individual feedback for the students and can be seen as assessment for learning. Teachers or schools are not assessed on the basis of standards test results either. For teachers class results of standard tests provide a means of self-evaluation in order to recognise strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and encourage them to improve their diagnostic competences. Furthermore, the results might be used to compare different teachers and schools, but rankings are explicitly **not** included in the intended functions of standards tests. These tests primarily function as an instrument for self-evaluation to foster improvement and to help finding adequate remedial measures.

Legislation

Schulorganisationsgesetz (SchOG) (School Organisation Act) (Federal Law): BGBl. No. 242/1962; last amendment BGBl. I. No. 44/2009: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/gvo/schog.xml> (03-08-2009).

Schulunterrichtsgesetz (SchUG) (School Education Act) (Federal Law): BGBl. No. 472/1986; last amendment BGBl. I No. 117/2008: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/gvo/schug.xml> (06-08-2009).

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PART IV: IMPACT OF NATIONAL TESTING

Educational standards are still work-in-progress in the Austrian education system and therefore only two reports dealing with their implementation and their impact can be summed up in this place.

In 2006 *Freudenthaler and Specht* (Centre of School Development) conducted a survey on the implementation process of educational standards after the first year in piloting phase II (*Bildungsstandards: Der Implementationsprozess aus der Sicht der Praxis: Ergebnisse einer Fragebogen-Studie nach dem ersten Jahr der Pilotphase II*).

A questionnaire for teachers at the piloting schools was designed which covered the following aspects in respect to educational standards: (a) clarity: Are teachers aware in what ways educational standards can help to guide and design teaching?, (b) guideline and aid to orientation: In how far are standards diagnostic and action-guiding means of support for teachers in order to focus on the students' acquisition of lasting competences in their teaching? c) impact on teaching: Does working with standards influence the quality of teaching or the students' motivation?, d) use of standards for lesson planning: To what extent do teachers incorporate standards in their teaching and lesson planning – apart from using the sample items they were explicitly asked to test?

The survey also focused on the quality of information and communication. Teachers were asked (a) how well-informed they felt concerning the aims of educational standards, (b) if they were clear what was expected from them, (c) if they knew who to ask if they needed further information, (d) how well the communication between the project coordinators and the practitioners worked and (e) if they felt that

their opinions and concerns were appreciated and taken seriously. Apart from that, the impact of educational standards on cooperation between teachers as well as the need of improvement as to materials and accompanying research was a matter of interest. The teachers' overall-attitude towards educational standards was measured on the basis of their experiences and their perceived effort/cost-benefit relation.

The sample involved 859 teachers (82 primary teachers, 486 general secondary school teachers and 292 academic secondary school teachers and 17 respondents did not state at what school type they taught).

During the piloting phase the testing of sample items of the educational standards and giving feedback on that process was emphasised. However, only 2 % to 11 % of the teachers used standards in addition to that process on a regular basis in their teaching and about 50 % of the teachers used standards 'now and then' in their lesson planning. The remaining teachers restricted their use of standards during the pilot phase only to the testing of the sample items they were given. The educational standards and their possible application during the pilot phase was clear to most primary school teachers (74 %) but not so clear to academic secondary school teachers (53 %). About two thirds of the primary school teachers thought that educational standards were helpful in teaching in respect to development of lasting competences and half of the academic secondary school teachers shared that opinion. Approximately half of the primary school teachers and a quarter of the academic secondary school teachers saw an increase in students' motivation and improvement of their teaching as an effect of the educational standards. The general secondary school teachers' estimate was between these two groups. Between two thirds and 75 % of the teachers of all school types described the communication between project management, coordinators and multipliers and the piloting schools as positive and they were informed well enough. Compared to the first pilot phase an improvement had been achieved. Only 35-38 % of the teachers felt that their work in piloting educational standards was appreciated and taken seriously. A larger part of the teachers found that working with educational standards stimulated cooperation with their colleagues, specifically among colleagues teaching the same subject. Also cooperation between teachers of different subjects and grades became stronger. The majority of teachers still saw a need for improvement in the educational standards. Approximately 75 % of the teachers suggested that the sample items for the educational standards should be improved and they would like more in-service-training and support. The majority of teachers regarded working with educational standards as an 'interesting experience' but only a small number of teachers stated to have 'learnt something important'. Most teachers decided for 'not learnt anything new' or 'as clever as before'. Criticism was expressed concerning the educational standards for German, because reducing the competences to measurable dimensions like grammar, punctuation and text comprehension is not regarded as an adequate strategy by some teachers, because they miss more creative aspects. Other teachers think that the level is inadequate and they demand that there should be different minimal standards for different school types.

In 2008, the BIFIE report on the testings of year 8 and feedback to the results of educational standards (*Bildungsstandards: Testungen und Ergebnismeldungen auf der achten Schulstufe aus der Sicht der Praxis: Ergebnisse einer Befragung von Leiterinnen, Leitern und Lehrkräften der Pilotschulen*) was published. In that study 487 teachers and 81 school heads had to fill in questionnaires on different aspects concerning the results and feedback process of the standards tests. As far as *information* is concerned, the report came to the conclusion that the teachers and school heads knew the aims of the educational standards very well and felt well-informed. Teachers and school heads described the *students' discipline* quite high but their *motivation* quite low, but most students were willing to work hard in order to achieve good results. The *interest* on the part of the teachers seemed to be rather high, because 70 % of the teachers stated to have reflected on the results of their classes and their strengths and weaknesses intensively. Specially trained moderators were in charge of giving feedback and the communication with them was seen as well-functioning on the side of the teachers. Approximately half of the teachers were not surprised by the results of their classes and those who were surprised were so in a positive way. More than half of the teachers benefited from the results because they helped them to

recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their own class and their standing in comparison to other classes. The usefulness of the educational standards lies – according to the majority of teachers – in supporting diagnostic competences rather than in aiding planning. 30 % of the teachers and heads stated that communication in their schools had been intensified and 22 % answered that questions of school quality became more of an issue, but 60 % of the teachers said that 'hardly anything' changed on the school level as well as on their individual level of teaching.

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Unrevised English.

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