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

European Commission

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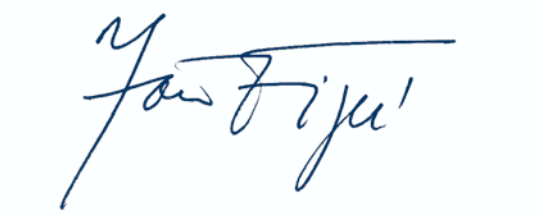
PREFACE

Improving the quality and efficiency of education is at the centre of education policy debate at both national and EU level. It has a crucial role to play in Europe's Lisbon strategy to build its future prosperity and social cohesion. It lies at the heart of the EU's goals for education and training in the period up to 2020. It involves raising performance in compulsory education, in particular with regard to the high percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, maths and science and more generally preparing young people for the knowledge society of the 21st century.

In this context, reliable information on pupil performance is key to the successful implementation of targeted education policies and it is not surprising that in the past two decades national tests have emerged as an important tool for providing a measure of educational achievement.

This Eurydice report provides a review of the context and organisation of national tests in 30 European countries and the use made of test results for individual pupils and at school and national levels. It presents the diverse choices made by European countries regarding the objectives, frequency and scope of national tests and points to important aspects of national tests where countries could learn from each others' experiences. It also emphasises the need to develop coherent systems of pupil assessment that establish a balance between nation-wide tests and other forms of assessment which aim not only to grade pupils but to help them improve.

I am confident that this new Eurydice publication will make a significant contribution to the debate on the role of national tests which is ongoing in many European countries, and that it will be a useful and up-to-date source of information of interest to education decision-makers, experts and practitioners alike.



Ján Figel'
Commissioner responsible for
Education, Training, Culture and Youth

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INTRODUCTION

The national testing of pupils is becoming increasingly important across Europe as a means of measuring and monitoring the quality of education, and structuring European education systems. This study was undertaken at the request of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2009. In the Czech Republic, interest in the topic is linked to a national policy debate on the possible introduction of national testing as an instrument for improving the quality of education.

The purpose of the study is to provide a comparative review of the development, aims and organisation of national tests in the countries of the Eurydice Network ([1]) and to gain an understanding of how test results are used in the educational career of individual pupils, as well as at school and system levels.

For this report, national testing – which is only one form of pupil assessment – is defined as 'the national administration of standardised tests and centrally set examinations'. These tests are standardised by the national education authorities or, in the case of Belgium, Spain and Germany, the top-level authorities for education referred to here as the 'central level'. The tests contain centrally set procedures for the preparation of their content, administration and marking, and for the interpretation and use of their results. National testing is carried out under the authority of a national or centralised body and all examinees take the tests under reasonably similar conditions. Tests for detecting developmental problems, which are administered to certain children at the beginning of compulsory education, as well as tests organised for admission to secondary schools that specialise in the teaching of certain specific subjects, are not included. Various standardised guidelines and other tools designed to assist teachers in undertaking forms of pupil assessment other than national testing are also beyond the scope of the report.

The study covers national testing for summative or formative purposes. It discusses objectives and uses related both to the career of individual pupils, such as the award of certificates, streaming, or help for learning, and to the aggregated results of groups of pupils which are used as one of the criteria for the evaluation of schools, teachers or local authorities, or for the monitoring of the education system as a whole. Both compulsory and optional national tests are considered, as are sample-based national tests.

The reference year for the study is 2008/09 and information relates to education at ISCED levels 1 (primary education) and 2 (lower secondary education). National tests that have not been fully implemented in the 2008/09 school year are also included. ISCED levels 1 and 2 correspond to the period of full-time compulsory education in the great majority of countries covered here. In countries in which compulsory education continues into part of ISCED level 3, no tests that take place beyond ISCED level 2 have been considered. Reforms planned for subsequent years have also been included. Only the public education sector is described, except in the case of Belgium, Ireland and the Netherlands, in which the grant-aided private sector is also covered because it accounts for the majority of school enrolments. Moreover, in Ireland the vast majority of schools are defined legally as privately owned but in fact are fully state funded and do not require payment of fees by parents. In the

([1]) Turkey has not contributed to this report.

Netherlands, equal funding and treatment of private and public education is enshrined in the constitution.

For the purposes of the study, the various national tests across Europe have been divided into three broad categories:

- The first group consists of tests which summarise the achievement of individual pupils at the end of a school year or at the end of a particular educational stage, and which have a significant impact on their educational careers. In the literature these tests are also referred to as summative tests or the 'assessment of learning'. Their results are used to award certificates or to take important decisions concerned with streaming, school choice or progression from one year to the next, etc.
- The second distinct group of national tests are primarily intended to monitor and evaluate schools and/or the education system as a whole. 'Monitoring and evaluation' here refers to the process of collecting and analysing information in order to check performance in relation to goals and to take corrective action where necessary. National test results are used as indicators of the quality of teaching and the performance of teachers, but also to gauge the overall effectiveness of education policies and practices.
- A third group of national tests are mainly for the purpose of assisting the learning process of individual pupils by identifying their specific learning needs and adapting teaching accordingly. These tests are centred on the idea of 'assessment for learning' and may be broadly described as 'formative assessments'.

The report consists of three chapters, a summary of key issues and an annexe containing country tables.

Chapter 1 entitled 'pupil assessment in Europe – the context and emergence of national testing' provides an overview of the development of national testing over recent decades and the underlying reasons for its increasing use.

Chapter 2 on the 'aims and organisation of national testing' contains detailed information about the purpose of such testing and the conditions under which it is undertaken, including its frequency, subjects tested, types of questions, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and bodies responsible, etc.

Chapter 3 deals with the 'uses and impact of national test results'. It examines the use made of test results for purposes relating to individual pupils, schools, local authorities and the entire education system, with a special focus on the arrangements for reporting results. The impact of national tests is discussed in the case of countries that have undertaken national surveys or held policy debates on this topic.

In addition, detailed descriptions of the context and organisation of national tests in the majority of participating countries are available on the Eurydice website. Also included on the website is a review of research results concerning the impact of national tests, which has been undertaken by an external expert ([2]).

([2]) Nathalie Mons (August 2009), Theoretical and Real Effects of Standardised Assessment.

As regards the methodology used for the purpose of data collection, the Eurydice Unit within the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency developed a 'guide to content' in close consultation with the Czech Eurydice Unit and experts from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and the Institute for Information on Education. The comparative analysis is based on responses to this guide from Eurydice National Units. The report has been checked by all National Units except that of Bulgaria, and all contributors to it are acknowledged in a separate final section.

CHAPTER 1: PUPIL ASSESSMENT IN EUROPE – THE CONTEXT AND EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL TESTING

The national testing of pupils, which is defined as the national administration of standardised tests and centrally set examinations, is one of the instruments used in the systematic measuring and monitoring of the performance of individual pupils, schools and national education systems. National tests are shaped by and evolve in accordance with national policy agendas and structural contexts, and are often linked to other forms of assessment.

This chapter first presents a brief summary of the main forms of pupil assessment and the ways in which it is organised across Europe. It then describes the historical emergence of national testing in each of the countries concerned. In the last part of the chapter, parallels are drawn between the introduction of national tests and the changing policy frameworks that have been shaping European education systems in recent decades.

1.1. Brief overview of the main forms of pupil assessment

Pupil assessment across Europe presents a complex picture comprising a variety of assessment instruments and methods which may be internal or external, formative or summative, and assigned varied levels of importance. Despite these variations in approaches to pupil assessment, the process of assessing learning outcomes forms part of the overall structure of education systems. In all countries, pupil assessment forms an integral part of teaching and learning and thus, ultimately, an instrumental factor in improving the quality of education.

The process of pupil assessment is usually regulated by special legislative acts or national curricula guidelines and teacher manuals. These regulations set out the basic principles of assessment, including its aims and sometimes a range of recommended approaches. Other aspects of assessment very often covered by legislative documents are the possible grading of pupils, criteria for their progression through school, reporting arrangements and communication with parents.

The most common type of assessment used in compulsory education is known as continuous assessment. It involves assessing the daily classroom participation of pupils, their coursework, oral and written tests and assignments, and practical assignments or project work. It can be used for both formative and summative purposes. In all countries, formative assessment is performed by teachers on an ongoing basis as an integral part of their activity throughout the school year. It is aimed at monitoring and improving the process of both teaching and learning, by providing direct feedback to teachers and pupils alike ([1]). Although formative assessment is usually the responsibility of individual teachers, others may become involved in the process. For instance, in Belgium (German-speaking Community), formative assessments provide the class council (the school head and all staff members responsible for teaching and educating a particular group of pupils) with important indications as regards the organisation of measures for supporting the pupils efficiently. In Portugal, formative assessment is the responsibility of individual teachers who maintain a dialogue with pupils and collaborate both with their teacher colleagues – particularly within the curricular departments and the

([1]) For further information on formative assessment, see OECD, *Formative Assessment – Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms*, 2005.

class councils who design and manage curricular projects, based on the national curriculum – and, where appropriate, with specialised education support services, parents or guardians.

In some countries, formative assessment is predominant in the first years of education, especially at primary level, and then supplemented by summative assessment as pupils progress through each further year. Summative assessment refers to the systematic and periodic collection of information resulting in a judgement at a particular point in time about the extent and quality of pupil learning. It usually occurs at the end of each term, school year and educational level, and is used by teachers to report on the achievements of pupils both to their parents and the pupils themselves, or to take decisions that can affect their school career ([2]). Summative assessment is often combined with formal meetings between teachers and parents (e.g. at special school evenings), or with other forms of communication such as school reports, correspondence with parents, or newsletters discussing the progress of pupils.

In reporting on the results of formative or summative assessment, additional information about the motivation of pupils or even their social conduct may be considered. For example, around half the *Länder* in Germany are performing an assessment of the work-related and social behaviour of primary school pupils. In the Netherlands, tests are continually used to gain an insight into the progress and learning levels of pupils, as well as their socio-emotional development. At secondary schools in Liechtenstein, the learning behaviour of pupils along with their learning outcomes, work habits and conduct are documented in school reports.

In some countries, schools and teachers are relatively free to decide how they will implement their assessment policies in practice. In such cases, teachers and teacher councils are as a rule solely responsible for the majority of pupil assessments and for decisions concerning the progress of pupils ([3]). For example, schools in Bulgaria can organise school tests in any subject and at any time they deem appropriate. Similarly in the Netherlands, in which schools for both primary and secondary education are highly autonomous, the testing of pupils is subject to few official regulations. In nearly all schools, a particular form of assessment will be used to determine whether pupils have reached the level normally expected after a fixed period, and the schools themselves will decide how this should be done. In Spain, the criteria for pupil assessment are governed by the official curricula, and the official curricula of the Autonomous Communities may also include some relevant guidelines. However, schools and teachers take their own decisions about the assessment methodologies and tools to be used, the frequency of continuous-type assessment, the promotion of pupils and the qualifications awarded to them. Although, in Romania, official regulations state that schools are responsible for the formal procedures governing the educational assessment and progression of pupils, teachers themselves are free to plan and decide on assessment methods and instruments, as well as to apply them and report on the results. In Iceland, there is no standardisation of pupil assessment as practised by different schools and teachers, and the progress of pupils is also reported in many different ways.

([2]) For further information on summative assessment, see Harlen, W., *Assessment of Learning*, 2007.

([3]) For information on teacher and school responsibility for pupil assessment, see Eurydice (2008), *Level of Autonomy and Responsibility of Teachers in Europe*, pp. 30-37.

National tests based on centrally set procedures are often used to ensure that the performances of individual pupils are readily comparable. The results of these tests can be compared at various levels. They provide pupils with information about their own acquired knowledge which can be compared to that of their peers and the national averages. When national tests have a significant impact on the subsequent career of pupils, because (for instance) the results are used to award them a final grade, they help to ensure that school certificates remain comparable regardless of where they are obtained. This in turn can be additionally significant for the future career path of pupils, which may depend all the more, for example, on their school record made available to prospective employers. Teachers also use the results of some national tests to compare the learning attainment of individual pupils, identify specific learning needs and adapt their teaching accordingly. Finally, schools may employ such information to find out where they stand in relation to other schools and to national performance data.

Countries with a longer tradition of national testing both to help schools and teachers evaluate the knowledge, skills and competences of pupils and improve education in general, are developing policies and strategies meant specifically to achieve a balance between teacher- or school-based assessment and national tests and examinations. As already noted, schools in the Netherlands are highly autonomous in the area of pupil assessment. Many use intermediate targets and tests to measure the progress of pupils. Part of the *Leerling- en Onderwijsvolgsysteem* (LVOS, or pupil and education monitoring system) is the *Entreetoets* (entry test), which gives insight into their progress and the results of education itself in terms of their language, and arithmetical/mathematical and study skills. The *Eindtoets Basisonderwijs* (final test – primary education) is a national test which is not compulsory but taken by the majority of pupils. Its aim is the provision of independent information to support school recommendations to parents when selecting a form of differentiated secondary education. As primary school heads and their teaching staff are legally bound to report on the attainment of pupils when they register for secondary education, they act in accordance with the views of parents and children, the assessments and appraisal of their school and, often, the results obtained in the independent test for school leavers. However, the main aim of schools is to integrate the approaches of the *Leerlingvolgsysteem*, the *Entreetoets* and the *Eindtoets Basisonderwijs*. In addition, an Educational Careers Cohort Survey (COOL) follows pupils from the age of 5 until they reach 18 as they progress through education, focusing on their cognitive, social and emotional development. To monitor these aspects, pupils periodically complete tests and questionnaires and their entire school career is also systematically documented.

The United Kingdom provides another example of how the system of national curriculum assessment is made up of different forms of assessment, including national testing. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, statutory assessment procedures which exist for all pupils during primary education (ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED 2) are closely related to the curriculum. The system was introduced to help raise educational attainment, inform the parental choice of school and achieve school accountability. Although formal tests were initially an important element, the system has continued to evolve, and the current procedures rely on teacher assessment exclusively in Wales and at some stages in England. However, even though their form has changed, the system of national curriculum assessment in England, Wales and Northern Ireland remains, and maintains similar aims and standardised procedures for the preparation of content, administration and the marking and interpretation of results.

Similarly in Scotland, different types of assessment help to support learning on behalf of individual pupils, schools and local authorities, and the whole of Scottish education in the form of one coherent system. Formative assessment and the use of assessment information are both strongly promoted, the former in relation to individual learning and progress and the latter in evaluating and improving the quality of learning across the system. Summative assessment of individual pupils is very dependent on how teachers professionally judge their coursework. In this context, the results of the national assessments in English language and mathematics can be used to confirm these judgements of pupil attainment, while the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) uses tests to assess the attainment of a nationally representative sample of pupils in English/literacy, mathematics/numeracy, science and social subjects in a four-year cycle. National testing is therefore embedded in a wider policy of assessment *for* learning, *as* learning and *of* learning and, even in relation to the last, it has a limited role alongside other important assessment activities.

A variety of assessment instruments are thus used in European countries in order to gather information for teaching and learning. They include both continuous assessment by teachers, for formative or summative purposes, and national tests. The latter may contribute to a more comprehensive picture of pupil knowledge and skills by providing additional information to parents, teachers, schools and the entire education system. The national testing of pupils has been introduced in almost all European countries over the last three decades, and has grown to become an important instrument in the organisation of education systems. The underlying reasons for the emergence and use of such instruments vary from one country and period to another.

1.2. Historical background of national testing

Except in a few countries, national testing is a relatively new form of pupil assessment in Europe (Figure 1.1). The introduction and use of national tests began slowly and sporadically, and has increased significantly only since the 1990s. In the current decade, some countries are still introducing this type of assessment instrument, while those that started earlier have seen further developments in their national testing systems.

Among the first countries to introduce a form of national test have been those that developed standardised instruments for taking decisions about the school career of pupils. They have included tests leading to the award of certificates, but also those used as a basis for promoting pupils at the end of a school year or streaming them at the end of primary or lower secondary education, corresponding to ISCED levels 1 or 2 respectively (see Chapter 2). As far back as 1946, Iceland adopted nationally coordinated final examinations for ISCED level 1 (replaced in 1977 by similar examinations for ISCED levels 1 and 2) and used them to decide whether pupils should progress to the next school year. In Portugal, national examinations introduced in 1947 for pupils at ISCED levels 1 and 2 (but abolished in 1974) were the basis for their progression to the next level and for the award of certificates. Also in 1947, transfer tests were introduced in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) under the Education Act (Northern Ireland) to determine selection for post-primary education. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), 'ordinary grade' examinations at ISCED level 2, which led to the award of certificates at the age of 16, were introduced in 1962. In Luxembourg, the entrance examination first implemented in 1968 (and replaced in 1996 by the 'standardised test within the streaming procedure') was used for pupils to progress from primary to secondary school. Similarly in the Netherlands, the final test at the end of ISCED level 1, first carried out in 1970, forms a basis for school

recommendations regarding the progression of pupils to secondary education. In Malta and Denmark, national testing was introduced in 1975 in the form of annual examinations for primary and secondary schools (Malta) and final tests at the end of secondary school (Denmark).

Relatively early on, five countries – Ireland, France, Hungary, Sweden and the United Kingdom – introduced national testing which served purposes other than those linked to individual school careers, and which was mostly based on representative samples. In Sweden, national tests at ISCED level 2 were introduced in 1962 to support teachers in comparing results in their own classes with a national standard. Ireland introduced national assessments in English reading (ISCED level 1) in 1972 as a result of public debate about standards in the subject. In France, national tests were introduced following the education reform of 1977, first at primary schools and later at secondary level, partly with the aim of improving evaluation of the education system. In 1978, the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) was introduced in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). It carried out surveys on a sample of pupils normally aged 11 and 15 (but occasionally 13), in order to identify significant differences of achievement related to the circumstances in which children learn, including the incidence of underachievement, and to make the findings available to staff responsible for resource allocation within the Department of Education and Science, local education authorities and schools. Hungary started carrying out regular 'monitor' surveys at both ISCED levels 1 and 2 in 1986 following adoption of its 1985 Education Act. These surveys established the content and tools for the monitoring, evaluation and quality control of public education.

During the 1990s, national testing of pupils became more widespread with a further 10 countries or regions introducing this form of assessment. For example in Spain, the 1990 Act on the General Regulation of the Education System (LOGSE) brought about significant changes in evaluation of the system, including implementation of the first national assessment of pupil achievement at primary level in 1994. Belgium (French Community) started carrying out national tests in the same year, first in primary and then in secondary education, to gather information about pupil performance. Latvia and Estonia began soon after they regained their independence in 1991, with the development of national systems for the assessment of pupils at ISCED levels 1 and 2, which were first implemented in 1994 and 1997, respectively. In Romania, national examinations were initiated in 1995 to test pupils on the completion of primary education.

In the present decade, national testing has been introduced in 11 more countries or regions. National tests have been introduced and fully implemented in Belgium (Flemish Community), Lithuania and Poland since 2002, and in Norway since 2004. Full implementation of tests in the remaining countries has still to be completed. Since 2003, Slovakia has undertaken the national testing of pupils on a project basis at the end of lower secondary school, with full implementation due in 2009. Austria and Germany launched pupil assessments based on national education standards in 2003 and 2005, respectively. As a result, an amendment to the Austrian School Instruction Act of 2008 has provided the legal basis for the introduction of education standards, while the development of standardised tests (at ISCED levels 1 and 2) is in the baseline testing phase – with the first regular and country-wide standards testing scheduled for 2011/12 and 2012/13. Standards adopted in Germany in 2004 were implemented through national testing in secondary education in all *Länder* in 2005/06. Besides testing for central comparisons between the *Länder*, comparative tests based on educational standards are to be conducted in each *Land* from 2009 onwards. Bulgaria introduced national tests at

the end of primary education in 2006 and is planning to extend the national testing system to cover further school years in 2009/10. Similarly in Cyprus, a country-wide test at the end of primary education has been carried out annually by the Ministry of Education since 2007. Its purpose is to identify pupils at risk of developing functional illiteracy by the end of compulsory education, in order to provide them with extra support in lower secondary education. An extension of the test to grades 2 and 9 is currently in a pilot phase. In Denmark, national tests are due for full implementation in 2010. In Italy, national testing at ISCED levels 1 and 2 was developed in 2008. Since then it has been undergoing further implementation and is scheduled to be fully operational in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years.

In six of the countries which introduced national testing in earlier decades, further tests have been added to the one initially established. To the first national test held in the United Kingdom (Scotland), the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) was added in 1983 to evaluate overall national attainment based on the assessment of representative samples of all pupils at particular stages of primary and secondary education. In addition, a national test for identifying individual learning needs (at ISCED level 1 and the first half of ISCED level 2) was introduced as part of the 5-14 reform of curriculum and assessment in 1991. In Malta, two more examinations for taking decisions about the school career of pupils were developed at ISCED level 1 (1981) and ISCED level 2 (1994), respectively, following the introduction of annual examinations for primary and secondary schools. As a means of identifying individual learning needs, Ireland introduced a revised form of national testing, the 'junior certificate' (1992), an examination at the end of lower secondary level (ages 14/15), and obligatory nationally mandated standardised testing in English reading and mathematics (2006) at two points in ISCED level 1. The latter has also been the objective of the above-mentioned national tests added in Denmark (National Tests, full implementation by 2010) and Luxembourg (Standardised tests, 2008). Similarly in France, a system of diagnostic assessment, which is compulsory for all pupils at the transition between ISCED levels 1 and 2, was put in place in 1989 – after the adoption of the education law of July 1989 – for teachers to assess the achievement levels of the former as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, a monitoring assessment cycle at ISCED levels 1 and 2 (2003-08) has been added to the national testing system, which will enable comparisons to be made over time from 2009, when a new cycle begins.

Other changes in national testing systems include the replacement or abolition of some tests. The latter took place in Ireland, where the optional national certificate examination for pupils at the end of primary school was abolished in 1967. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), 'standard grade' courses and national examinations superseded 'ordinary grade' examinations in 1984 for all 14-16-year-old pupils (ISCED level 2); in 1999, an alternative system of courses leading to new 'national qualifications' was introduced, which at present runs in parallel with 'standard grade'. In Hungary, too, the first national test at ISCED level 2 was replaced in 2001 by another national test with a similar objective, namely the monitoring and evaluation of schools. In addition, the test at ISCED level 1 was revised to identify individual learning needs. There have been similar developments in several other countries, in which the first national tests have been replaced by new ones with different aims. This partly applies to Iceland where the first such tests, which had a significant impact on the school careers of individual pupils, were replaced in 1977 by nationally coordinated examinations intended, in school years 4 and 7, to help identify their learning needs. It was only in year 10 that these examinations remained determinant, as the results were taken into account in awarding certificates at

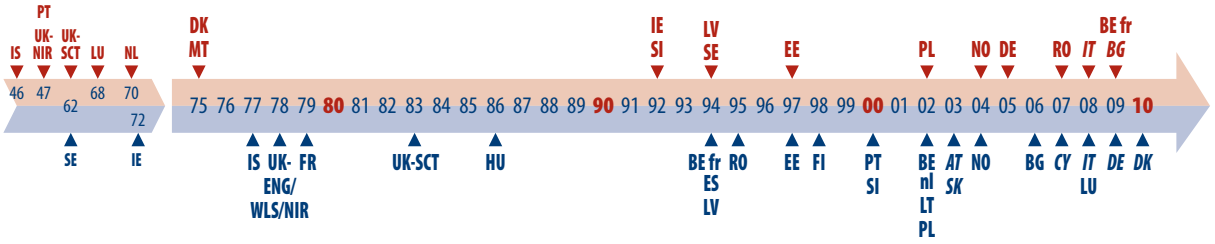
the end of compulsory education. Although in 2008 they were discontinued, the year 10 examination is being reintroduced from the 2009/10 school year, but with the fresh aims of identifying individual learning needs and of monitoring schools and the education system as a whole.

In Portugal, national tests at ISCED levels 1 and 2 were abolished 35 years ago. However, in 2000 a new method of assessment was devised for school years 4 and 6 (ISCED level 1), while national testing was reintroduced in order to monitor schools and the education system. In 2005, examinations for taking decisions about the school career of pupils were reintroduced at ISCED level 2. In Lithuania, the achievements of individual pupils on the completion of basic education were first compulsorily tested in 1998, with significant implications for their school careers. In 1999, with the reform of basic education, testing became an instrument for monitoring schools and the education system, and was fully implemented as such in 2002. Since 2003 testing in basic education has no longer been compulsory, and pupils themselves decide whether they will be tested. In addition, a National Studies of Student Achievement test was introduced in 2002. In Slovenia in 2000, the first nationally coordinated group assessment, which was one element in the admissions procedure for upper secondary schools, and thus a test with a significant bearing on the educational career of pupils, was replaced by another form of national assessment aimed at monitoring schools and the education system. Finally, the situation in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) is more complex. In 1988, the work of the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) came to an end, and in the same year the Education Reform Act (ERA) specified the introduction of a national curriculum and, alongside this, a system of national assessment. It introduced testing at the end of the first three 'key stages' of the national curriculum (covering ISCED levels 1 and 2) as of 1991. In 1999, Wales and Northern Ireland were granted devolved powers from the UK government to administer their own domestic arrangements, including education, since when the paths followed by the devolved administrations as regards pupil assessment have increasingly diverged. In Wales, national tests have been replaced with statutory teacher assessment. Similarly in Northern Ireland, the previous system of 'key stage' assessment (1-3, i.e. ages 5 to 14) has been replaced with teacher assessment and a standardised annual reporting format. In England, national tests at the end of 'key stage 3' (age 14) were abolished as a statutory requirement in 2008/09, and will be replaced with increased and improved classroom assessment and more frequent reporting to parents. National tests remain at the end of 'key stages 1 and 2' (ages 7 and 11), as a key element of the accountability framework in primary schools. Optional national curriculum tests continue to be available to schools. They are used to diagnose strengths and weaknesses across a class and for individual pupils; however, they are not statutory, not publicly reported upon and not centrally marked.

In five countries, namely Belgium (German-speaking Community), the Czech Republic, Greece, the United Kingdom (Wales) and Liechtenstein, national tests are not currently held. Instead, continuous pupil assessment is carried out internally by schools using both formative and summative types of assessment and different instruments. Its main aim is to determine learning and attainment levels. In addition, in Greece, the yearly 'review examinations' follow standardised guidelines designed to give obligatory directions to teachers when undertaking continuous assessment. In Liechtenstein, the results of pupil assessment provide the education system with feedback that contributes to continuous improvement of the system. Furthermore, there are plans now under discussion to introduce national testing for monitoring purposes but also to obtain individual results, by the end of the 2010/11 school year. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, standardised national examinations are among the long-term

policy objectives of the education system. Over the last few years, the Ministry of Education has used pilot projects at ISCED levels 1 and 2 to examine the possibility of introducing national examinations and is currently evaluating the results of these experiments to that end.

Figure 1.1: Year of first full implementation of national testing, ISCED levels 1 and 2



Countries shown in italics are in the process of reaching full implementation.

Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Belgium (BE de), Czech Republic, Greece, United Kingdom (WLS) and **Liechtenstein**: No national tests at ISCED levels 1 and 2 in 2008/09.
Denmark: In 2003 the 'form 10 test', which is voluntary for pupils in the optional year 10, was adopted. The national tests are due for full implementation in 2010.
Ireland: Until 1967, an optional national certificate examination was held for pupils completing primary school.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in 2008 for 2009 entry.

Explanatory note

This historical overview takes into account the year of first full implementation in each country of national tests for taking decisions about the school career of individual pupils, including tests for the award of certificates, or for promotion at the end of a school year or streaming at the end of ISCED levels 1 or 2, and the year in which each country introduced national tests for other purposes, such as identifying individual learning needs or monitoring schools and/or education systems. Subsequent changes in the number or aims of national tests are not considered.

1.3. Changing policy frameworks behind national testing

Although in the majority of European countries, schools and teachers have traditionally had little freedom to develop the curriculum and set teaching objectives, they have still been primarily responsible for assessing individual pupils ([4]). However, with the development of reforms for greater decentralisation and school autonomy, as well as a broader choice of schools and paths through education, national tests have been increasingly used to monitor the performance of schools and education systems ([5]), while retaining their potential as an instrument for assessing pupils during or at the end of compulsory education.

Historically, the main aim of national testing was to create a standardised method of assessment with a significant impact on the school career of pupils. It included national tests for the award of

([4]) See Eurydice (2008) *Levels of Autonomy and Responsibilities of Teachers in Europe*.

([5]) For more detailed information on the historical context of national testing, see the literature review *Theoretical and Real Effects of Standardised Assessment*, N. Mons (August 2009) on the website www.eurydice.org.

certificates to them at the end of a school level, as in the case of the 'primary certificate' examinations held in Ireland until 1967, or the *Folkeskole* leaving examination introduced in Denmark in 1975. In addition, other national tests that affected school careers were introduced, such as those governing promotion at the end of a school year or streaming at the end of a school level. In both Luxembourg and the Netherlands, for example, the national tests introduced in 1968 and 1970, respectively, provide a basis for the progression of pupils from primary to lower secondary school. Similarly in Malta, the first national tests known as 'annual examinations' were introduced in 1975 as a means of determining progression from one school year to the next as well as streaming pupils in core subjects. In Iceland, the nationally coordinated examinations, which replaced the previous selection examination in 1977, were introduced to identify pupil attainment levels at certain stages of compulsory education. More recently, promotion, streaming or the award of certificates have remained key justifications for introducing national testing in some countries. In the external examination system implemented in Poland in 2002, the aim of the exam at the end of lower secondary school has been to grade pupils on completion of this educational level. Similarly in Germany, national testing was introduced in 2005 to support the award of certificates, as well as the grading of pupils and their progression to the next stage of education.

Besides the existence of national tests for taking decisions about the school career of pupils, developments at system level have accompanied the emergence and increasing use of tests. The trend towards decentralisation and school autonomy across Europe from the 1980s onwards ([6]) was characterised by a general shift within education systems from normative regulatory frameworks to policy frameworks that provided for increased democratic participation and freedom for schools on the one hand, but created new measures for the evaluation of educational outcomes on the other. Such was the case in France when, during modernisation and democratisation of the education system in 1979, the first national test was implemented to measure both the performance of pupils against the aims of education programmes and differences in the performance of schools. Similarly in Hungary the emergence of a democratic system of education, together with decentralisation, led in 1986 to the establishment of a system for the standardised evaluation of schools and school outcomes.

From the 1990s onwards, growing decentralisation and school autonomy became more widespread. Meanwhile, the policy frameworks underlying the national testing of pupils in Europe focused increasingly on monitoring micro-level actions at macro level or, in other words, on the systematic use of pupil assessment in schools to monitor the education system as a whole. In the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) the Education Reform Act 1988, along with the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, gave all schools greater autonomy but also increased central control of the school curriculum and strengthened arrangements for accountability frameworks, through national pupil assessment. All measures were intended to improve school standards. Similarly in Sweden, the national testing system was redesigned as a result of the 1991 reforms in the system of educational governance, which brought about a change in the division of responsibilities between the central government and the municipalities, and the transition from a regulated school system to results-based management. In Latvia and Poland, school management reforms involving a high level of local school and teacher autonomy prompted the need for a national-level method and mechanism to measure the performance of schools. Finland too began to decentralise the administration of

([6]) See Eurydice (2007) School Autonomy in Europe: Policies and Measures.

education in the early 1990s and, with the fresh emphasis on local responsibility, the use of national assessments to evaluate education became regulated by law (1998 Act on Basic Education). Moreover, the national assessment of learning outcomes in Finland is also linked to questions of regional equality and comparability. In Spain, where the Act of 1990 formally recognised that evaluation of the education system was critical in maintaining and improving its quality, national tests were introduced just when responsibilities for education were transferred to the Autonomous Communities, as a means of evaluating the nationwide common goals of the system.

If, previously, national testing was generally introduced as part of a renewal of political and administrative structures, in the decade since 2000 most countries have begun relying on tests in order to monitor and improve the quality of education and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their education systems. Indeed, in some countries, national testing is used to measure quality on the basis of educational standards developed specifically for this purpose. For example, following the establishment of its 'national curriculum', Belgium (Flemish Community) has implemented testing as a system for measuring performance against attainment and developmental targets. Likewise in Germany, national testing came into being after the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs had adopted measures in 2003 to develop and maintain high quality education through binding standards applicable to schools in all *Länder*. Efforts to measure and improve quality were moreover fuelled by the results of international surveys such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which intensified discussion of education systems in Europe. In around one-third of European countries, this increased the demand for fuller information about the curriculum and teaching methods. In Hungary and Austria, for example, the results of the studies gave rise to heightened concern over the quality of schools and teaching, which led Austria to introduce – and Hungary to reintroduce – national testing as a way of monitoring pupil skills on an objective and regular basis. In some countries, such as Lithuania and Iceland, the goal of improving the quality of education went hand in hand with efforts to promote the development of a self-evaluation culture. In other words, national tests were introduced so that they could function as a 'mirror' for schools and teachers to improve their performance on their own initiative ([7]), as discussed further in Chapter 3. In this context, national tests have been increasingly used mainly to support the learning of individual pupils by identifying their needs and adapting teaching accordingly. In Denmark and Luxembourg, for example, this kind of test has been added to the national assessment system, in order to monitor the progress and achievement of pupils and to yield relevant information so that teachers can target their needs more effectively and schools can improve the quality of their education. These developments are indicative of a general trend in current national testing, in which external standardised evaluations to monitor the education system are linked to internal evaluations or self-evaluation on the part of schools. The aim is to combine traditional top-down models of monitoring with bottom-up approaches to pupil assessment at school level, so that the quality of education is gauged more effectively and thus improved.

([7]) Thélot C., *Évaluer l'École*, Études 2002/10, Tome 397, pp. 323-334.

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In short, the national testing of pupils in Europe has gradually expanded in recent decades. While several countries introduced national tests at a relatively early stage, they became much more widespread from the 1990s onwards. In some countries today, national testing is still being introduced and developed. The underlying reasons for its implementation vary from one country to the next. In the last two decades, national testing has been increasingly introduced as a natural accompaniment to growing school autonomy, which has resulted in a need to systematise the monitoring of education systems, and in efforts to improve the quality of education. In recent years, these objectives have come to coincide. Chapter 2 of this report now examines how national testing within education systems is organised.

CHAPTER 2: AIMS AND ORGANISATION OF NATIONAL TESTING

The present chapter will concentrate on the aims, scope and organisation of national tests across Europe and will attempt to distinguish between common patterns and country-specific solutions, as reported by national education authorities with reference to the 2008/09 school year ([1]). Tests that have not been fully implemented during this reference year (see Chapter 1) are also included.

2.1. Aims of national testing in Europe

For the purposes of the present study and taking the declared main aims of national tests as a key criterion, a broad distinction may be drawn between three categories of tests. These groups will in turn be linked to the most common target group of pupils, comprising either a whole cohort or samples, and the primary or lower secondary levels of education (ISCED levels 1 or 2 respectively). The actual uses of test results, which often go beyond the main aims as stated, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The first group of tests summarise the attainment of pupils at the end of a particular educational stage and may have a significant impact on their school career. For example, the results of these tests are used to award certificates, or to make important decisions regarding streaming, progression from one school year to the next, or the final grading of pupils. Such tests are also known as summative tests or the 'assessment of learning'. In half of the countries considered, the award of a certificate is reportedly the main aim of at least one national test. In addition, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands organise national tests whose main purpose is to select or stream pupils.

Generally speaking, tests with a significant impact on the educational career of pupils are compulsory either for all of them, regardless of the type of school attended, or just for those in public-sector schools. Even where tests are optional, as in the case of the ‘national qualifications examination’ in the United Kingdom (Scotland), or the Dutch CITO test, nearly all pupils take them in practice.

As a rule, these tests are taken on the completion of lower secondary education, which in the majority of countries coincides with the end of compulsory education. Only a few countries organise tests with much at stake for pupils in primary education. In Belgium (French Community) and Poland, national tests for the award of certificates are held on the completion of primary education. In the Netherlands, the CITO test at the end of primary education informs parents about the most suitable type of secondary education for their children. Similarly in Luxembourg, the results achieved by pupils in national tests at the end of the sixth year in primary education are among the criteria used to decide whether they should be admitted to general or technical secondary education. In Malta, tests held on the completion of primary education serve as entrance examinations for the ‘junior lyceums’.

The second distinct group of national tests consists of standardised assessments whose main objective is to monitor and evaluate schools, or the education system as a whole. More than half of the countries surveyed report the existence of such tests. Among their commonly reported aims are the comparison of performance across schools, the provision of input into measures for school accountability, and performance evaluation of the entire system. The results of tests are used in conjunction with other parameters as indicators of the quality of teaching and, less commonly, the

([1]) For types of test that remain beyond the scope of this report, see the Introduction.

performance of teachers. They also serve as pointers to the overall effectiveness of education policies and practices, and to whether or not improvements have occurred at a particular school or at system level.

When describing the aims of tests in this group, some countries place greater emphasis on the performance of individual schools and assessment of their educational effectiveness, as in the case of Latvia, Hungary, Austria and the United Kingdom (England).

In other countries, the focus is on the education system with relatively scant reference to the monitoring of school performance. Results of national tests are used for national monitoring in Belgium (Flemish Community), Estonia, Ireland, Spain, France, Lithuania, Romania, Finland and the United Kingdom (Scotland).

While national tests to monitor schools are often compulsory for all pupils, tests that concentrate on the system as a whole are generally taken by just a representative sample.

The main aim of the third and final group of national tests is to support learning processes, by clarifying the specific learning needs of pupils and identifying appropriate personalised follow-up and teaching. The tests in this group focus primarily on 'assessment for learning' and can be broadly described as 'formative assessments'. Although far less is at stake for individual pupils than in tests for the award of certificates, these standardised tests – in conjunction with continuous assessment by teachers – are important in improving performance and can lead to significant learning gains ([2]).

National tests for formative purposes are organised in 12 countries or regions, namely Belgium (French Community) ([3]), Denmark, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, Sweden, the United Kingdom (England and Scotland), Iceland and Norway. Such tests can be either compulsory as in Hungary, Sweden and Norway, or optional as in the United Kingdom (England and Scotland). Since 2007 in France, diagnostic assessments in primary education have become optional, whereas diagnostic tests at the beginning of lower secondary education remain compulsory.

National tests are often intended to serve several purposes across the three foregoing categories. For example, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Portugal report that their tests for the award of a certificate are also to be used to monitor the education system. Other countries including Bulgaria, Italy and Slovenia state that the same national tests are employed for monitoring purposes at both school and system levels. Tests in Belgium (French Community), Austria and Slovenia are intended both to identify individual learning needs and to monitor educational performance.

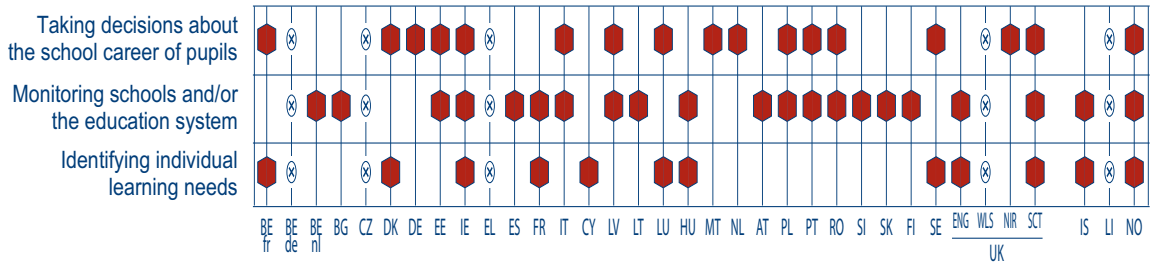
Assessment experts have warned that the use of a single test for several purposes might be inappropriate where the information ideally required in each case is not the same. In such instances, education authorities have been advised to rank the different purposes in order of priority and adjust test designs accordingly ([4]).

([2]) For further reading about assessment for learning, see the review of research in Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box, Assessment Reform Group, University of Cambridge, 1999.

([3]) The formative tests in years 2 and 5 of primary education and year 2 of secondary education have been postponed to the 2009/10 school year.

([4]) For further information on the use of national tests for a variety of purposes, see Paul E. Newton, Evaluating assessment systems, Qualification and Curriculum Authority, June 2007.

Figure 2.1: Main aims of nationally standardised tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice

Additional notes

France: A written examination with content standardised at national level is organised in several subjects for the award of the national certificate (the *brevet*) at the end of lower secondary education. Despite the existence of central procedures for administering and marking this examination, it cannot be regarded as a form of nationally standardised testing, given the wide variety of practices adopted in marking and interpreting its results.
Poland and **Iceland**: One or more national tests have two equally important objectives.

Explanatory note

Only the main aim of each national test is represented in the Figure. Countries are allocated more than one category if they administer several tests with different main objectives. For further information on every national test and its main aim, see the Annexe.

2.2. Organisation and characteristics of national tests

This section will examine the conditions under which national tests are organised in terms of timing and frequency, target groups, school subjects tested, types of testing instruments, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the participation of pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

2.2.1. Frequency and timing of national tests

Significant variations are apparent from one country to the next, both in the frequency with which individual pupils take national tests and the precise cohorts or years of education that are tested. Some of these differences may reflect national priorities in education, while others may be partly attributable to the varied organisational structures of European education systems. As regards the latter factor, it should be borne in mind that some countries provide full-time compulsory education within a single structure, while others clearly distinguish between primary and lower secondary education. Moreover, although pupils in most cases follow the same general curriculum until the end of lower secondary level, several countries oblige them to opt for a particular branch or type of education from the beginning of that level or prior to its completion. Finally, in the majority of countries compulsory education lasts nine or ten years, whereas in Belgium, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom it lasts two or three years longer and continues into upper

secondary provision at ISCED level 3. However, national tests taken subsequent to the completion of ISCED level 2 have not been considered in this study ([5]).

The number of school years at which national tests are organised, regardless of whether each pupil in a given year is tested, varies considerably across countries. For example, Denmark, Malta and the United Kingdom (Scotland) have developed national tests for almost every year of compulsory education. The United Kingdom (England) and France may also be regarded as countries in which national testing is widely practised, with seven and six national tests respectively.

By contrast, several countries test a much lower number of school years. Countries that administer only one national test during ISCED levels 1 and 2 include Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, Spain, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland). If a country organises only one national test during compulsory education, it is usually held in the final year of primary or lower secondary education.

The majority of the remaining European countries administer national tests in two or three specific school years during the whole of compulsory education. This might thus be considered the predominant model in Europe (see Figure 2.2).

There is an ongoing debate among policy-makers and other professionals in education about the benefits and potentially negative effects of frequent testing. Discussion has focused on the need to find a balance between the legitimate aim of obtaining an up-to-date picture of pupil attainment and the burden that tests place on pupils and teachers, by reducing the amount of effective teaching time and causing overload and stress. For example, experts and teachers in Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom have acknowledged that some tests – and especially those with much at stake for pupils – create undue stress which can in turn demotivate them (see Chapter 3).

([5]) For a comprehensive description of European education systems, see Eurybase on the Eurydice website: www.eurydice.org.

Figure 2.2: Number and type of national tests and school years in which they are administered, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09

	CT	ST	OT	Number of tests and school years in which they are administered
BE fr	1			Year 6 of primary education
BE de				–
BE nl		2		Years 6 and 8
BG	3			Years 4, 5 and 6
CZ				–
DK	10			Between years 2 and 8
	1			Year 9
DE	1			Year 9
EE		2		Years 3 and 6
	1			Year 9
IE	3			End of 1st class/beginning of 2nd class; end of 4th class or beginning of 5th class; year 3 of post-primary education
		2		Second and sixth classes
EL				–
ES		1		Year 4 of primary education
FR		4		Two at the end of primary education, and two at the end of compulsory education
			1	Year 3 of primary education (known as 'CE2')
	1			First year of lower secondary education
IT		3		Two in year 5 of primary education; one in year 1 of lower secondary education
	1			Year 3 of lower secondary education
CY	1			Year 6
LV	3			Years 3, 6 and 9
LT		2		Every year in either years 4 and 8, or years 6 and 10
			1	Year 10
LU	3			Years 3 and 6 of primary education, and year 5 of secondary education
HU	3			Years 4, 6 and 8
MT	8			Years 4 ,5 and 6 of primary education; forms 1 to 5 of secondary education
			2	Year 6 of primary education; end of secondary education
NL			1	Final year of primary education
AT		2		Years 4 and 8
PL	2			Year 6 of primary education; Year 3 of lower secondary education
PT	3			Years 4, 6 and 9
RO		1		Year 4
	2			Years 7 and 8
SI			1	Year 6
	1			Year 9
SK	1			Year 9
FI		2		Years 6 and 9
SE	3			Years 3, 5 and 9
UK-ENG	2			Years 2 and 6
			5	Years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8
UK-WLS				–
UK-NIR			1	Year 6
UK-SCT			6	Five tests in the National 5-14 Assessment Bank and one test in year 4 of secondary education
		4		Years 3, 5 and 7 of primary education; year 2 of secondary education
IS	2			Years 4 and 7
LI				–
NO	4			Years 2, 5, 8 and 10

CT = compulsory tests ST = sample tests OT = optional tests

Source: Eurydice

Additional notes

Belgium (BE fr): The compulsory tests in years 2 and 5 of primary education, and year 2 of secondary education have been postponed to the 2009/10 school year.

Ireland: The sample tests are carried out every five years. The most recent sample tests took place in the 2008/09 school year.
Spain: The test in year 4 of primary education is taking place for the first time in the 2008/09 school year. A second test in year 2 of lower secondary education is being administered for the first time in the 2009/10 school year. These two tests will take place every three years. In addition, all Autonomous Communities will administer compulsory tests for all pupils in the same school years.

Lithuania: In the sample tests, school years 4 and 8 are tested in odd (calendar) years, and school years 6 and 10 are tested in even years.
Netherlands: While participation in the test is at the discretion of the school or authority concerned, in practice nearly all pupils take it.
Finland: In most cases, one or two sample tests are administered each year. Generally the tests take place in school years 6 and 9, or at other curricular transition points.
United Kingdom (ENG): Tests at the end of year 2 are used to support the teacher assessment process and not reported on separately. Optional tests are used by the majority of schools but they are not statutory.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests were taken in November 2008 for entry in September 2009.
United Kingdom (SCT): During nine years of education and depending on their progress in class work, most pupils take five tests from the National 5-14 Assessment Bank. Though these tests and the national examinations in year 4 of secondary education are in principle optional, almost all pupils take them.
Iceland: The nationally coordinated examinations in school year 10 will resume from 2009/10.

Explanatory note

Compulsory tests are tests that have to be taken either by all pupils regardless of the type of school attended, or only by pupils in public-sector schools. Optional tests are taken at the discretion of the school or pupil concerned.

As regards the earliest school year in which national testing occurs, a minority of countries hold tests in the very first year, usually to identify individual learning needs. For instance the Scottish National Assessment Bank is available from the first year for children aged 5, although they normally take their first test in years 2 or 3. In Ireland, pupils take a nationally mandated test to support individual learning either at the end of first class (ages 6-7) or at the beginning of second class (ages 7-8) and, as part of the National Assessment of English Reading (NAER), samples of pupils in second class are tested for a second time. Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom (England) and Norway, start testing in the second year of school, with only the last two countries pursuing aims other than the identification of individual learning needs.

In Europe, it is more common to carry out nationally standardised tests for the first time in school year 4 (Bulgaria, Spain, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Romania and Iceland), or in a later year corresponding to the end of primary education as in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia. Generally in both cases the pupils tested are aged between 10 and 12. Such tests most often serve monitoring purposes and, except in Malta and the Netherlands, do not have a decisive impact on future school careers.

As to the precise point chosen for testing in the school year, education authorities in most cases organise national tests towards the end of the school year. Among the exceptions however are the Dutch CITO test, which is administered in February, and the French ‘assessment of basic competences’ in French and mathematics which takes place in March. Given their specific function of providing information for subsequent intervention, some tests to identify individual learning needs are held at the beginning or the middle of the school year, as in the case of tests in Belgium (French Community), France, Luxembourg and Iceland.

In certain cases, the timing of the tests is not centrally determined but is basically at the discretion of the school authorities or teachers. This applies to the test in year 2 (the final year of ‘key stage 1’) in the United Kingdom (England) or the National 5-14 Assessment Bank in the United Kingdom (Scotland). Nevertheless it would appear that for the Scottish Assessment Bank at least, the preferred period is May to June.

2.2.2. Subjects tested

National tests are based on the curriculum and linked to national education standards in the subjects tested. For example, in the United Kingdom (England) the national curriculum tests (as the name indicates) aim to chart pupil attainment in relation to 'national curriculum subject orders'. Similarly, in Portugal, the national tests assess and monitor the application of the prescribed curriculum. In Belgium (Flemish Community) the tests are exclusively concerned with the compulsory attainment and developmental targets of the curriculum. Austrian and Romanian national tests are also specifically linked to education standards in the tested subjects. The test for the German school leaving certificate in years 9 or 10 is related to the curriculum of each *Land* but also to the national education standards agreed at federal level.

In the past decade, the emphasis in national curricula has gradually shifted from subject knowledge to a competence-based approach. As far as national tests are concerned, this trend is probably best reflected in the situation in Spain and Hungary. In the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC), evaluation concentrates not on the subject material itself but on whether pupils are able to use their knowledge and skills in reading and mathematical literacy in real life situations (school years 6 and 8). Furthermore, Spain has adopted the notion of competences and applies a much less rigid subject division in national testing, also focusing specifically on the application of knowledge.

At European level, the December 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on 'Key Competences for Lifelong Learning' ([6]) defines eight competences, which represent a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes considered indispensable in the knowledge society. Among these eight competences only three, namely communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, and mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology, can be directly linked to individual subjects. As discussed below, these three competences are the ones most commonly assessed in national tests. By contrast, in many European countries the remaining key competences such as 'learning to learn' or social and civic competences, which usually relate to more than one subject, are not at present generally assessed in national tests.

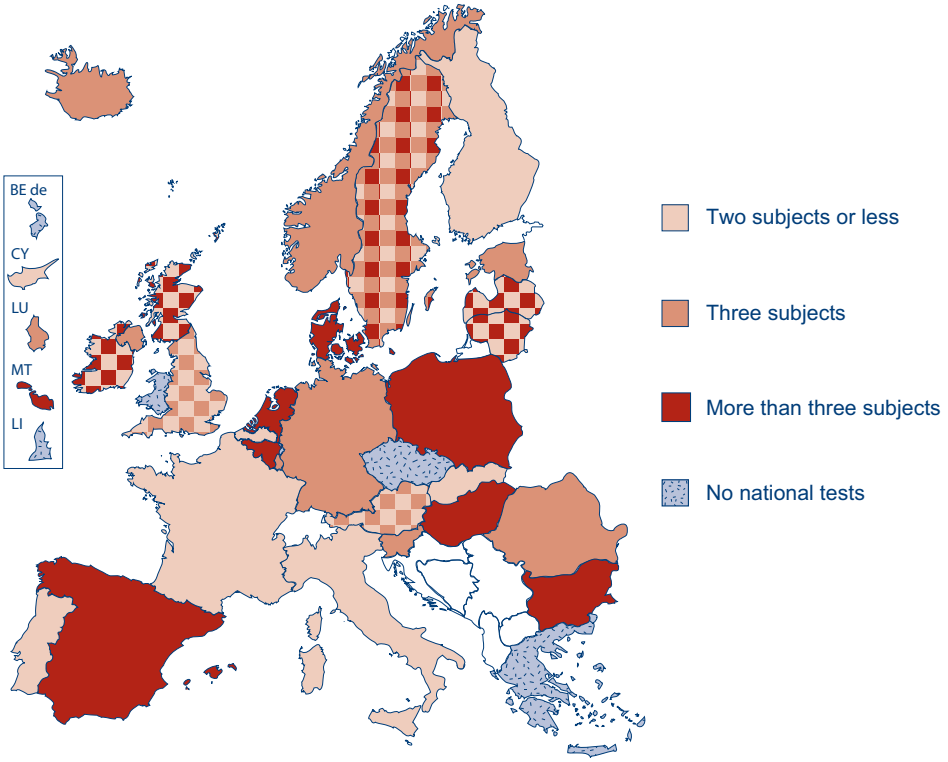
An examination of the range of subjects included in national testing shows that, in general, fewer subjects are tested at primary level and that the emphasis is on the language of instruction (reading and writing) and mathematics. Not surprisingly, several tests for the award of certificates at the end of lower secondary education cover a much wider range of subjects.

Beyond this general pattern, and bearing in mind that the number of tested subjects may vary in some countries depending on the test or school year concerned, two general models are apparent. Certain countries limit national testing to two or three subjects, although several of them have announced plans to widen its scope by adding additional ones. Other countries test a much broader spectrum of the curriculum. While some countries do this on an annual basis, others rotate subjects or use a combination of compulsorily and optionally tested subjects.

([6]) Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Official Journal of the European Union L394.

Among countries in the first group, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and Slovakia report that they test only the two main subjects – the language of instruction and mathematics. To these two subjects, Germany, Austria, Slovenia (a test in school year 6), Iceland and Norway add a foreign language. Luxembourg tests the two official languages, German and French, and mathematics. In Italy, sciences and English as a foreign language will be also tested from the 2010/11 school year.

Figure 2.3: Number of subjects covered in national tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional note

Latvia and **Slovakia**: Pupils in minority education programmes are also tested in the state language.

Explanatory note

The Figure indicates the number of subjects tested in each school year. Where this number varies from one test or school year to another, countries are shown in more than one category. In some countries and for certain tests, the number of subjects can vary from year to year because of the way the latter are rotated. For further information about the subjects covered in each test and school year, see the Annexe.

Countries in the second group choose to test a broader range of subjects, either on a consistent basis year by year or through the rotation of subjects in some tests. Nevertheless it is most uncommon for countries to test pupils across the entire breadth of the curriculum and, where this occurs, tests tend to be held at the end of compulsory education. Interestingly however, Denmark and Malta – two countries that test pupils using standardised tools more often than the remainder – have also chosen to test very widely in terms of subject coverage.

Thus in primary education in Malta, pupils can take up to four tests (see Figure 2.2) and each time five subjects are covered, i.e. the two official state languages, Maltese and English, mathematics, religion and social studies. In the five 'annual examinations' during secondary school, pupils are tested in around ten subjects covering Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies, science and a range of compulsory and optional subjects in the arts, sciences, languages and humanities.

Similarly, from the second school year and up to the end of compulsory education in Denmark, pupils have to take between ten and 36 tests in Danish, mathematics, English, biology, physics/chemistry and geography. Testing in each of these subjects is compulsory in certain specific school years. In addition, optional tests are held in Danish as a second language.

By contrast, Ireland which also administers many national tests – though not all of them annually – concentrates solely on attainment in English reading and mathematics, in the five-yearly national sampling tests and nationally mandated annual standardised tests at ISCED level 1. However, for the 'junior certificate' at the end of year 3 of post-primary education, pupils take a test in compulsory core subjects, namely Irish, English, mathematics, and civic, social and political education (CSPE), to which over 20 other subjects are added. The majority of pupils take nine or ten subjects in this examination.

Indeed, it is common for tests leading to the award of a certificate at the end of lower secondary education to include a very broad range of subjects which are not tested nationally prior to that particular stage. This applies to the 'national examinations' in Latvia and the 'national qualifications' in the United Kingdom (Scotland). The same general trend is also apparent in Malta and Denmark, in which the secondary education certificate examination and the *Folkeskole* leaving examination, respectively, include an extended list of subjects in comparison to the already broad range tested in earlier school years.

In monitoring and formative tests, several countries rotate the subjects tested, thereby covering more subjects without significantly increasing the burden imposed by testing on pupils and teachers. For example, in the monitoring tests in Belgium (Flemish Community), samples of pupils in school years 6 and 8 are tested in only one subject chosen annually by the Ministry of Education from a group which includes mathematics and Dutch, French as a foreign language and 'environmental studies – time, space, society and the use of information sources'. In the 2008/09 school year, years 6 and 8 were both tested in mathematics.

In the monitoring tests in Finland, samples of pupils are most often tested in just one subject which is either the mother tongue or mathematics or, less frequently, a third subject or cluster of subjects fixed in accordance with national priorities. In 2008/09, pupils in school year 6 were tested in mathematics, and those in year 9, in Swedish as a second foreign language and in the mother tongue.

For the formative 'external evaluations of student achievements' in Belgium (French Community), subjects are rotated on the basis of three-year cycles. For example in 2008/09, pupils in three different school years were tested in sciences, history and geography (although the tests were in the event postponed until 2009/10); in 2009/10, pupils are being tested in reading, writing and foreign languages (although, in the latter, only in year 6 of primary education); in 2010/11, it will be the turn of mathematics and foreign languages (although, for the latter, only in year 2 of secondary education).

General diagnostic evaluation in Spain aims to assess eight key competences on a cyclical basis. In 2008/09, linguistic communication competence, mathematical competence, knowledge and competence in interaction with the physical world, and social and civic competence were assessed in year 4 of primary education. In 2010, the same competences will be assessed in year 2 of secondary education. Plans for the remaining years of the cycle will be determined by the governing council of the national Institute of Evaluation (IE). In diagnostic evaluations undertaken by the Autonomous Communities, it will be up to each Community to fix the schedule for testing the eight key competences. Most Communities will assess linguistic communication competence and mathematical competence every year. In certain cases, all key competences will be tested in the same year.

In France, subjects are rotated on the basis of a five-year cycle in national monitoring tests at the end of both primary and secondary education. These cycles include all subjects studied except arts and sports. Thus, in the first year of the cycle, pupils are tested in French, in the second year in foreign languages (English, German and Spanish), in the third year in civic behaviour and life in society, in the fourth year in life and earth sciences, physics and chemistry, and in the fifth year in mathematics. In 2008/09, pupils completing both primary and lower secondary education were tested in French.

Countries sometimes also change one of the tested subjects annually. In Estonia, the standardised sample test in school year 6 includes Estonian or Russian as mother tongue, mathematics and a subject which differs from year to year and is announced by the Ministry of Education and Research one month before the test. Similarly, in Slovenia the national test at the end of the third stage of the single structure (year 9) assesses achievement in Slovenian (or Hungarian or Italian in ethnically mixed areas), mathematics, and a third subject determined annually by the Minister of Education from a group comprising a foreign language (English or German), biology, chemistry, physics, engineering and technology, geography, history, civics and homeland education and ethics, music, and arts and sports.

Denmark, Estonia, Ireland and the Netherlands use a combination of compulsorily and optionally tested subjects. For instance, the Dutch CITO test consists of three compulsory and one optional subject. The Irish ‘junior certificate’ test covers compulsory subjects and others which are generally optional, although some of them may also be compulsory depending on the type of school. The Estonian test for certificates awarded at the end of compulsory education includes three subjects altogether. Two centrally determined subjects are compulsory: the first is Estonian language and literature in Estonian medium schools, and Estonian as a second language in Russian medium schools; the second one is mathematics. The third subject is chosen by pupils from a list of optional subjects.

While the subjects most often tested are the language of instruction and mathematics, followed by one or more foreign languages and sciences, some countries have adopted an approach which provides for the testing of certain cross-curricular skills. Thus the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) and the Scottish National Qualifications are mostly subject-based, but they also include some aspects of core skills like problem-solving, working with others and ICT. From 2009 to 2011, the Finnish ‘national evaluation of learning outcomes’ is assessing achievement in the cross-curricular topics taught in basic education, which include growth as a person, cultural identity and internationalism, media skills and communication, participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship, responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future, safety and traffic, and technology and the individual. In the

monitoring tests in Belgium (Flemish Community) the subjects 'environmental studies – time, space, society and the use of information sources' and 'information acquisition and processing' are being tested in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years, respectively.

In Poland, the test at the end of primary education is entirely based on cross-curricular material and assesses performance in reading, writing, reasoning, using information and practical application of knowledge. A second test at the end of lower secondary education contains three distinct parts, namely humanities, science (maths and natural sciences) and a modern foreign language, with the first two parts also cross-curricular.

2.2.3. Types of test question

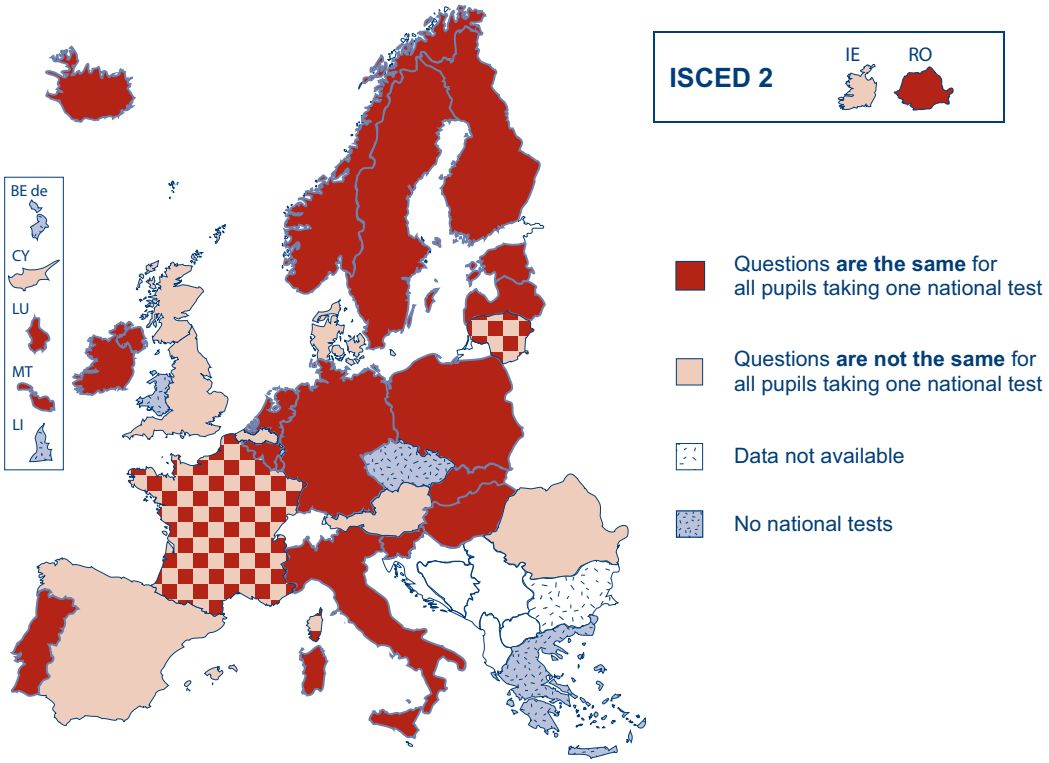
In the vast majority of countries, national tests represent a combination of subject-centred and skill-based questions and tasks. As regards the particular types of question, countries most often favour a mix of multiple-choice items, short answers or essays, and open-ended questions depending on the subject and school year. However, the Dutch CITO test and some of the tests organised in France and Italy use exclusively multiple-choice questions. This is also the dominant type of question in Bulgaria and Norway.

Although written tests of the 'paper and pencil' variety are the most common, oral tests are sometimes used. Moreover, some countries such as Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, France and Latvia also make use of practical assignments.

Test questions are supplemented by background questionnaires for school heads, teachers, parents and/or pupils in 13 countries or regions, namely Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Estonia (for teachers only), Ireland, Spain, France, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Finland, the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Iceland. This practice most often concerns tests organised for monitoring purposes. The data collected relate to the socio-economic background of pupils, their motivation, support measures or the school climate. The questions for teachers cover teaching experience, professional development activities, teaching methods and other topics. From the information gathered, it is possible to undertake contextual analysis of test results and identify factors having to do with schools, teachers, home background and pupils, which may affect performance.

In Finland for example, a questionnaire filled in by school heads and teachers requests background information on their schools and on how the latter manage the learning process. Another questionnaire is completed by the pupils and concentrates on their attitude towards the subject tested, its perceived usefulness and relative level of difficulty. A non-compulsory pupil questionnaire is also part of the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC). Parents and pupils complete the questionnaire jointly prior to testing. It gathers basic information about the background of pupils and charts their social, economic and cultural capital, as well as that of their families.

Figure 2.4: Standardisation of test questions, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

France: Questions are the same for all pupils undertaking the 'system of diagnostic assessments' and the 'assessment of basic competences', while in the cycle for monitoring assessment at the end of primary and lower secondary education, questions are differentiated in accordance with item response theory.
Lithuania: In the 'national studies of student attainment' test, questions are not the same for all pupils, while in the basic education achievement tests, questions in a given national test are the same for everyone.
United Kingdom (NIR): The same transfer test is taken by all pupils. The last centrally provided transfer test to determine selection for post-primary education was taken in 2008 for 2009 entry.

Explanatory note

The reasons for a differentiation of national test questions – i.e. cases in which not all pupils taking one national test answer the same questions – can vary. They include efforts made to increase the efficiency of tests by adapting them to the level of knowledge and ability of each pupil, or by achieving coverage of tested knowledge and skills to ensure methodologically and statistically satisfactory results.

The extent to which countries include identical questions in a given national test varies. In a first group comprising the majority of countries, all pupils taking one particular test answer the same questions. However, in Ireland, France, Lithuania and Romania, this applies only to some national tests, as in other tests the questions may be different.

In a second group of countries, the questions in any given test differ on a regular basis and are not the same for all pupils taking it. Reasons for this range from a wish to take account of individual learning

differences and needs ([7]) to methodological considerations surrounding the analysis and evaluation of tests, or the desire to prevent cheating by pupils or teachers. Thus four countries vary questions to adapt their tests to individual learning levels and needs. For example, the national tests in Denmark, which are based on ICT, are closely adapted to the individual levels of the pupils taking them. Each pupil at every level is therefore challenged with a personalised test (see Section 2.2.4 below). In Ireland, pupils sitting the 'junior certificate' (ISCED level 2) are offered test papers at different levels of difficulty (higher level, ordinary, foundation). Pupils also have a choice of questions within individual test papers. The (now) optional 'national curriculum assessment' at the age of 14 ('key stage 3') in the United Kingdom (England) includes four different tiers for mathematics, each of which assesses a range of attainment levels. The teachers assess which tier would be most appropriate for a child's ability. For science there are two different tiers, each of which assesses different levels. As with the mathematics tests, the teacher assesses which tier would be most appropriate for a child's ability.

In the United Kingdom (Scotland), the Scottish 5-14 tests similarly consist of tests at different levels (A to F, which are related to defined attainment outcomes for most pupils at different stages of the school). Not only are there different tests/questions for different levels, the National Assessment Bank, from which the teacher downloads a test, contains several equivalent tests at each level, so pupils tested at the same level in different schools are not necessarily answering the same questions. This arrangement reduces the chances of pupils in one school informing those in another school of the content of tests.

In other cases, national test questions are varied for methodological reasons. In Belgium (Flemish Community) and France (in the cycle for monitoring assessment at the end of primary and lower secondary education), not all pupils need to answer the same questions because of the statistical methods applied (in accordance with item response theory). Similarly, national evaluation in Spain adopts a matrix sampling method in which all pupils take a set of common questions but also further different questions. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), not all pupils in the national monitoring sample taking the SSA respond to all the assessment tasks. The distribution of tasks across the sample is such as to ensure statistically satisfactory coverage of an appropriate range of knowledge and skills without overloading or stressing individual pupils. The same applies to Lithuania, in which pupils taking the 'national studies of student attainment' test do not all receive the same set of questions. The tests are constructed so that in the same subject area they do not vary in difficulty. In Romania, the national assessment (school year 4) at ISCED level 1, which is sample-based, uses a rotation design, with the result that the questions for all pupils doing a given national test are not the same.

([7]) This section considers solely the standardisation/differentiation of test questions within mainstream national testing. For the organisation of national testing targeting pupils with special educational needs, see section 2.2.5.

2.2.4. Use of ICT in national testing

Information and communication technology in the national testing of pupils, including the use of PCs, special software or the Internet, can serve various purposes. Depending on the application at hand, ICT may help either the teacher with administering tests, or pupils by adapting the test questions to their learning needs, for example by identifying questions that are challenging without overwhelming them. Alternatively, it may reduce the time needed to recode responses, score tests and report on them.

Across Europe, ICT is applied in national testing at different stages. In some countries, it is used at the time of testing, i.e. for on-screen testing as well as the marking of tests, while in others its use occurs solely at the marking stage.

Countries that carry out on-screen testing and rely on ICT to mark tests may be divided into those, such as the Netherlands and Norway, which employ traditional forms of computer-based testing and others, like Denmark, which adopt more innovative, adaptive computer-based methods. In addition to the paper-based 'final test – primary education' in the Netherlands, there are two digital editions of the test, namely the 'digital final test' and the 'level test' and 'levelplus test'. These digital editions are taken with the computer and on the Internet, and consist of the same components and questions as the regular test. All schools can if they wish opt for the 'digital final test' which may be especially useful for pupils who were absent at the time of the regular test, or may serve as a repeat test. The 'level test' and 'levelplus test', with an extended part on technical reading and extra questions on spelling, are intended for pupils with considerable learning difficulties. In Norway, pupils also use computers to answer test questions, and the marking of tests as well as the results and reports are automatically generated. Besides the possible use of computers for national written examinations in both the Netherlands and Norway, pupils in the latter may also use ICT in oral exams during a preparation period or for a presentation of the exam.

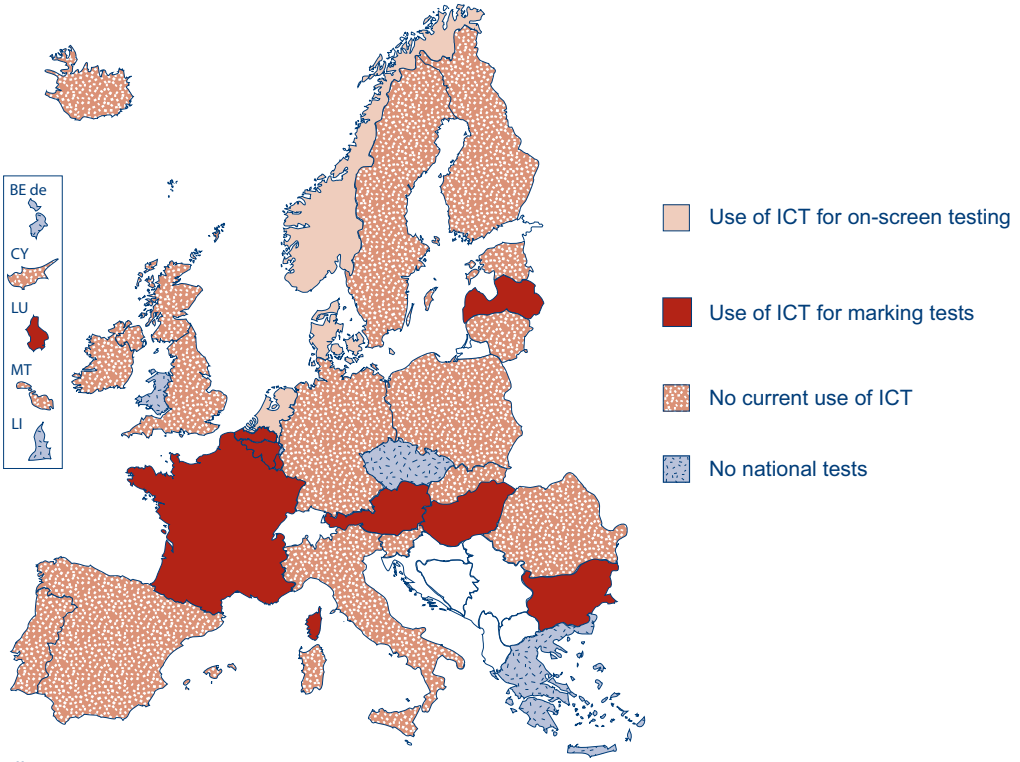
In the 'national tests' in Denmark, pupils use computers to answer questions which are accessed via a website, while the results and reports to teachers and parents are automatically generated. The system for on-screen testing in Denmark is known as 'computer-adaptive testing' (CAT), which means that the test is geared to individual levels of ability. Following a correct answer, pupils are asked more difficult questions and vice versa. The reasoning is that tests are most efficient when 'item difficulty' corresponds to pupil ability. The technological demands of this kind of testing are extensive, both in terms of system capacity and stability, and in calling for very large item banks with precisely the right mix of high quality items.

The national testing of pupils may face certain difficulties in the use of ICT. For example, Internet-related problems can delay online testing, while further technical difficulties associated with computers or special software may also arise.

Several other countries rely on ICT to mark tests. This applies to Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Austria, in which the use of ICT for marking purposes involves the application of a computerised correction grid or other forms of computer coding to help calculate results for individual pupils or a whole school class, or for different questions or the entire test. From 2009 onwards in France, ICT is being used in the testing stage itself. In Bulgaria, it is

mainly employed to mark tests and process the results. In the National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) in Hungary, the central analysis is carried out with ICT support, while presentation of the results for schools relies on special software. The same software provided by the department of assessment and evaluation of the Educational Authority enables schools to carry out further analysis themselves.

Figure 2.5: Use of ICT in national testing, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Belgium (BE nl): ICT for on-screen testing has only been used once in 2007 for 'French – listening'.
France: From 2009 onwards, ICT is also being used in the testing stage.
Malta: ICT is currently only used in ICT examinations in the Annual Examinations for Secondary Schools.
Slovakia: Online testing in the first part of the Slovak language and literature test was examined in 2007/08.
United Kingdom (SCT): ICT is currently being used for the online selection of tests. The National 5-14 Assessment tasks are downloaded online from the resource at Learning and Teaching Scotland and printed/copied by the school for use. For the National Qualifications examination, the Scottish Qualification Authority is trialling online assessment in some subject areas.
Iceland: On-screen testing will be gradually phased in throughout 2009 and 2010.

Finally, in over half of the countries considered, ICT is not at present used in national testing although they include some in which its use is planned or already piloted. For example, ICT feasibility tests have been carried out in Estonia which is intending to pilot online testing and the ICT marking of exam papers at the end of compulsory education in 2012. In Slovakia, online testing in the first part of the Slovak language and literature tests was examined in the 2007/08 school year. Since the 'technological plan for education' was drawn up in Portugal in 2007, plans are going ahead for progressive implementation of the 'electronic evaluation project', which includes the creation of

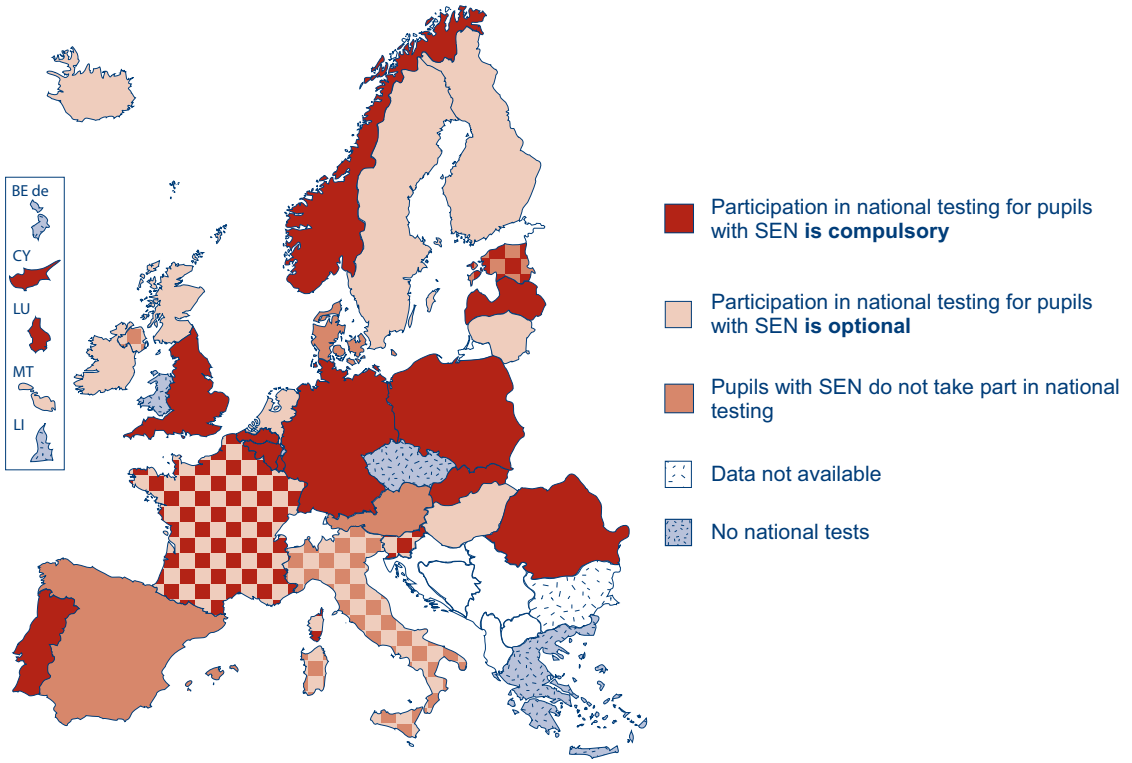
national tests in electronic format to promote the educational use of ICT. In Iceland, the Educational Testing Institute is now working towards the development of personalised examinations in electronic form. The plan is initially to add a computerised testing session in 2009 or 2010 to the nationally coordinated examinations for the tenth school year, while retaining most of the examinations with paper and pencil, but then gradually to increase the computerised share of testing and reduce the number of paper and pencil sessions. In Romania, the introduction of ICT for national assessments via a national pilot project is planned in the period from 2010 to 2013. In Poland, it is expected that ICT will be introduced for marking examination papers between 2013 and 2015.

2.2.5. Participation of pupils with special educational needs

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) form a heterogeneous group which is being involved in the process of national testing in Europe in various ways. Taking the definition of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997) ([8]) as a basis, the concept of special needs education refers to the education of pupils with disabilities or other learning difficulties, as well as of those who may be failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons known to be likely to impede a child's optimal progress. However, it is important to note that definitions and categories of SEN vary from one country to another, with different distinctions made between types of special needs. Moreover, special needs education may take place in special schools or within the mainstream system of education, depending on the country concerned. Whether or not this more broadly defined group of children receives additional support is again related to how far schools adapt their organisation, teaching and curriculum, including the assessment of pupils through national testing.

([8]) See UNESCO (2006) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997).

Figure 2.6: Participation of pupils with special educational needs in national testing, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Belgium (BE fr): Participation in national testing is compulsory for all pupils in the school years that are tested. However, for special needs education, schools are free to register their pupils on the basis of individual school achievement.
Belgium (BE nl): Pupils with SEN in mainstream education are encouraged to take part in national testing like all other pupils. Those who are in separate institutions for special education are not involved in testing.
Germany: For pupils with SEN in regular schools offering a qualification, participation in national testing is compulsory. For those in SEN schools not offering a qualification, it is not compulsory.
Estonia: Participation in national testing for pupils with SEN who follow the national basic school curriculum is compulsory. Pupils who follow the simplified national basic school curriculum or the national curriculum for those with moderate and severe learning disabilities do not take part in national testing. Neither do special schools for pupils with SEN.
France: Participation of pupils with SEN is optional for the 'assessment of basic competences', and the school head can decide whether or not their learning difficulties are such as to prevent them from taking part in the test under the same conditions as other pupils. For the 'system of diagnostic assessments', the participation of pupils with SEN is compulsory and the tests are adapted. Special schools for pupils with SEN do not take part in national testing, except those for visually impaired pupils which take part in the 'system of diagnostic assessments'.
Italy: In primary education and the first year of lower secondary education, pupils with SEN do not take part in national testing. In the third year of lower secondary education, the class teachers decide whether they should participate.
Cyprus: The test is compulsory for all pupils, including those with SEN, and there are no provisions enabling it to be adapted to the needs of the latter. Only pupils with severe disability may be exempted.
Netherlands: National testing as a whole is not compulsory. If a school decides to take the test, it is common for all pupils to do so even though they are under no obligation in this respect. In general, dyslexic or disabled pupils also take the test, albeit in adapted forms.
Poland: Pupils with moderate and severe mental disability are exempted.
Romania: The participation in national testing of pupils with SEN who are enrolled in general education is compulsory. For pupils with SEN in special schools, participation in national testing is optional.
Slovenia: The participation in national testing of pupils with SEN who are enrolled in the mainstream programme or its equivalent is compulsory in the ninth school year and optional in the sixth school year. Participation in national testing is optional in both school years if SEN pupils attend a programme with lower educational standards.

In general, countries belong to one of three groups depending on whether national testing for pupils with SEN is compulsory, optional, or effectively subject to exemption. The first group includes countries in which testing is compulsory for all pupils, so that those with SEN take part in national tests alongside the remainder. However, in the majority of these countries this obligation concerns only those pupils enrolled in general education. In most countries, special schools for pupils with SEN do not take part in national testing or their participation is optional. In the same group are moreover countries which have changed their national testing systems so that the participation of pupils with special needs has become compulsory. In France, where the participation of pupils in the 'system of diagnostic assessments' is compulsory, the tests have been adapted, e.g. in Braille or enlarged letters for people with visual impairments, or adapted material for pupils with physical disabilities. Estonia and Poland have developed materials specifically adapted to the needs of pupils with various disabilities (such as those with visual, auditory or other impairments). In Latvia, a number of measures have been introduced by the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations to support the participation of pupils with special needs in national testing. For example, pupils are offered more time to take the tests as well as more frequent breaks during testing, and can use various forms of support (including magnifying glasses, special reminders or information leaflets, etc.), while teachers are allowed to explain tasks orally or in sign language, and recordings can be played more than once. Similarly national tests in Slovenia, which are compulsory for pupils with SEN in the ninth school year, are adapted to various personal needs with (for example) magnified letters, electronic versions of materials, soundtracks and texts in Braille available for the visually impaired. The method of testing is also geared to SEN: more time or breaks are allowed during tests, assistants are on hand to offer support, and pupils can use computers or specially adapted equipment or resources.

While pupils with SEN in Portugal also take part in national testing, those who follow a highly personalised curriculum specifically adapted to their special needs are assessed in accordance with that curriculum. Portuguese schools may also exempt certain pupils from national testing. However participation in testing is in principle compulsory for all pupils, except for migrants or travellers who arrive in the country during the school year in which they would normally be tested or less than one year before it. Similarly, in the United Kingdom (England), pupils with SEN must follow the national curriculum. However, legislation does provide for amendments to some or all of this curriculum and the related assessment arrangements for individual children who have a statement of SEN. Schools can order, from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, modified test materials for pupils with visual impairment or other special educational needs, as well as modified mental mathematics test materials for pupils with hearing impairment and pupils who use sign language. In addition, the head teacher of a maintained school may also make temporary exceptions from some or all of the national curriculum and the related assessment arrangements for individual pupils, for a period of up to six months. Children assessed by their teachers as working below certain levels of the national curriculum eight-level scale of performance are not assessed by the formal tests in place, but by teacher assessment alone. This category may include pupils who have recently arrived from a different education system and cannot speak English.

In the second group of countries, national testing is optional for pupils with SEN regardless of whether the test concerned is optional or compulsory for pupils as a whole. Their participation depends on decisions taken by the schools, the individual pupils and their parents, or is governed by state regulations. For example, the latter occurs in Hungary in which the participation of pupils with special

needs in the National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) is regulated by legal documents and determined in accordance with the type and level of their learning difficulties. Some groups participate fully in testing, while others participate without their results being considered in the school reports. In Lithuania, participation in national testing of pupils with SEN is also optional. On submission of a written request, individual pupils with SEN (those with visual or hearing impairments or slight physical disabilities) can take part in testing in basic education, with the format of the task, and the instructions for its assessment and execution tailored to their health problems. In the 'national studies of student attainment' test, pupils with SEN can participate in the survey if the class or school is selected in the sample, and reforms are envisaged to tailor the survey materials to their needs. This already occurs in the Netherlands in which several adjustments to national tests are possible for dyslexic or disabled pupils, including the provision of a question booklet in Braille for the visually disabled, an enlarged or black-and-white version for visually impaired or dyslexic pupils, and extra time or a spoken version also for the dyslexic. Schools may exempt from national testing immigrant children who arrived in the country four years or less before school year 8, during which national testing takes place, and children who are expected to continue in special secondary education. Pupils eligible for learning support, who have general learning arrears of around one-and-a-half years in all areas can take the 'final test' or the 'level test'. If mentally disabled pupils wish to take the nationally coordinated examinations in Iceland, they may do so with their parents' consent. For pupils with other disabilities, materials adapted to their needs have been developed, as in the case of pupils with visual or hearing impairments or dyslexia. Moreover, head teachers may exempt immigrant pupils from taking tests in Icelandic, and they may also be exempted from the test in mathematics if they have lived in Iceland for less than a year. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), pupils previously described as having special educational needs and the larger number of pupils now described as having 'additional support needs' take 5-14 tests (at a level appropriate to their attainment in school work) and national examinations at the age of 16, at the discretion of their schools or teachers. If a mainstream school pupil with 'additional support needs' falls into the SSA sample, the school can again decide whether or not he or she will sit the test, taking account (for example) of the potential stress entailed.

Finally in several countries, pupils with SEN do not take part in national testing or their tests are not taken into account. They include Denmark, Spain and Austria. In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), children for whom an Education and Library Board maintains a statement of SEN do not take the transfer tests. However, children with SEN for whom a Board is not maintaining a statement, and whose parents are seeking places in grammar schools, can take the tests.

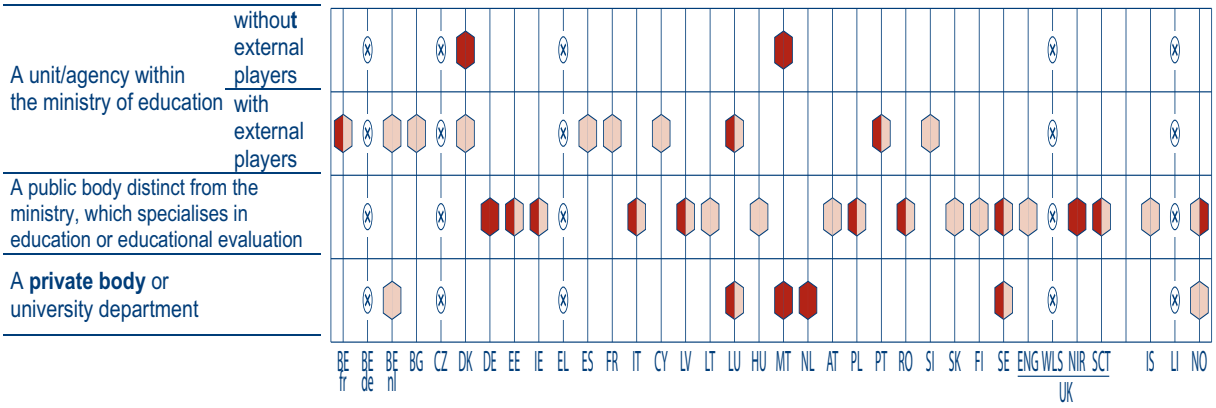
2.3. Players and bodies involved

This section considers the players responsible for setting, administering, and marking national tests. Identifying these responsibilities provides information that may be very helpful in addressing questions of validity and objectivity. This issue is all the more important for the fact that most national tests in Europe are currently administered on paper and nearly always include open questions (see sub-section 2.2.5 above) which cannot be marked by means of automatic optical scanning.

2.3.1. Setting of tests

Two main types of body are responsible for setting national tests in Europe, namely a unit or agency within the ministry of education, or a public agency set up by the ministry but distinct from it.

Figure 2.7: Bodies responsible for setting national tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice

Additional notes

Malta: The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examinations Board at the University of Malta sets the tests for the secondary education certificate examination taken at the end of compulsory education. The other tests are compiled by the directorate for quality and standards in education within the Ministry of Education.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests were taken in November 2008 for entry in September 2009.

Explanatory note

The determining factor in identifying types of test was the main objective of each test (see Figure 2.1). The Figure does not differentiate between tests held at ISCED levels 1 or 2 (or both levels). For further information on this point see the Annexe.

In 10 countries, the ministry of education is responsible for setting tests. Several European countries that led the way in introducing national tests to certify pupil attainment (see Chapter 1) – namely Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Iceland – entrusted this task to their ministry. Iceland created a separate institution in 1993.

Where a unit or agency within the Ministry is responsible for setting national tests, participants such as schoolteachers, experts or university staff are also often involved. However, in Denmark and Malta, certain tests with much at stake for individual pupils are set solely by the ministry. By contrast, while the ministry of education is responsible for setting tests in Bulgaria and Slovenia, it largely delegates this task to specially constituted boards.

The second – and most common – arrangement in Europe is one in which a specialised agency distinct from the ministry of education, is responsible for setting the tests. Such agencies were first established in the 1990s. Their main function may be to assess the education system, as in the case of the Invalsi in Italy, or to exercise wider responsibilities for supervising and regulating it, like the Educational Authority in Hungary, the National Education Agency in Sweden or the Finnish National Board of Education. The work of such agencies may also focus on the assessment of individual pupils for the award of certificates, as in Latvia and Poland.

Some of these institutions have benefited from international links. For instance, the German Institute for Educational Progress gained from the expertise of bodies in France and the United Kingdom. In Lithuania, between 1996 and 1999, the national examination centre performed the examination reform with advice and support from the Scottish Qualifications Authority partners. In Romania, the body responsible in 2000 for compiling national monitoring tests held at the end of primary education received expert technical assistance from the Dutch institute CITO, in selecting the pupil sample and developing test items and procedures.

In many cases, these institutions enlist teachers, experts and university staff to help with test-setting procedures. In some countries, they bring in a large number of players and bodies for this purpose. In Ireland, for example, the national tests in English and mathematics that are administered to samples of pupils at two points in primary education are the outcome of cooperation between the Test Department of the Educational Research Centre (Drumcondra) and national committees comprising representatives of various organisations, including the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum Assessment. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), the Scottish Survey of Achievement project management board takes decisions on each survey and receives advice on content and types of task from various parties, including government representatives, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (in local authorities), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, SQA assessment managers and teachers.

Some European countries diverge from these two main models (a unit/agency within the ministry of education or a specialised national agency distinct from it), and assign the task of setting national tests to other kinds of body. For example, tests are developed by universities in Belgium (Flemish Community), Luxembourg, Sweden and Norway (with the exception of tests for the award of certificates), but still under the supervision of the education ministry or a national agency specialising

in education. Meanwhile in Malta, responsibility for the secondary education certificate examination is assigned to the examinations board based at the University of Malta.

The Netherlands offers a different model. CITO, the central institute responsible for national tests, has been privatised since 1999. It was created by the Ministry of Education in 1968 and still receives public funding from the government for activities relating to national tests. The institute specialises in the development of tests and operates internationally. It also constitutes the only system in which schools or competent authorities have to pay for pupils to take optional national tests. Elsewhere, schools pay no costs for such tests.

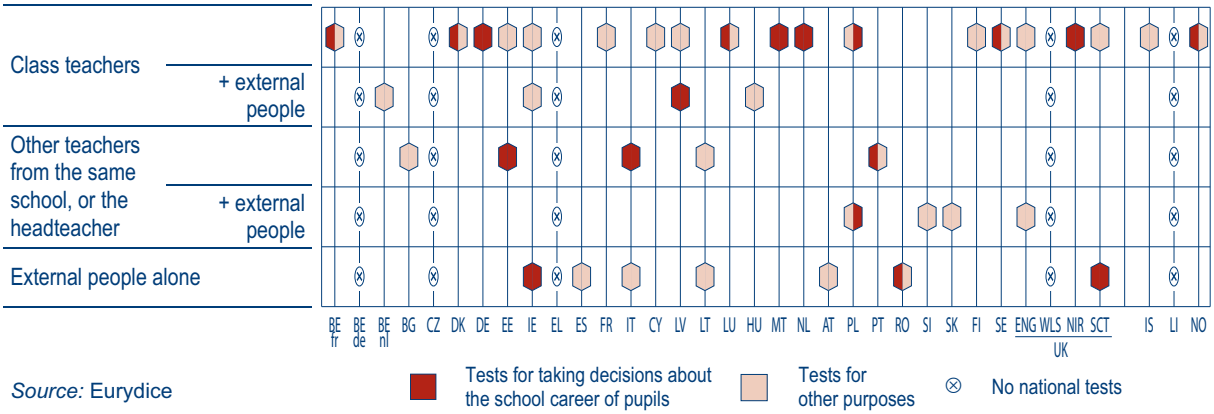
In Germany with its federal structure, and Spain with its decentralised education system, the national agencies for educational evaluation share decision-making about the design of national tests with the school authorities in the *Länder* and the Autonomous Communities respectively. In Germany, tests are set by the *Länder*. Their content reflects both the curriculum of the appropriate *Land* for the subjects and school years concerned, and the educational standards which were defined by the German Institute for Educational Progress and adopted in 2004 by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder*. In Spain, the national Institute of Evaluation (IE) and the corresponding bodies in the Autonomous Communities collaborate in carrying out national assessments of samples of pupils. While the IE is responsible for these assessments, Autonomous Community representatives are on its governing board and take part in decision-making about all steps in the national evaluation processes, which are agreed by consensus. Other tests covering all pupils are conducted on the sole responsibility of each Autonomous Community.

2.3.2. Administration of national tests

In the great majority of cases, national tests are administered to pupils by their teachers who have precise detailed instructions on how to undertake the task. This applies both to tests with a significant impact on the school careers of pupils and tests for other purposes. Where teachers administer tests for their own pupils, some countries have established certain practices to guarantee uniformity of procedure. Indeed, external invigilators supervise the process in Belgium (Flemish Community), Ireland (in tests administered to samples of pupils) and Latvia (in tests with much at stake for pupils).

In Hungary, one person in the school is appointed to coordinate the entire process of assessing basic competences. That person may attend prior training organised by the Educational Authority regional offices. In addition, where there are large numbers of pupils, staff of the school are designated to coordinate the way in which the National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) is conducted in classrooms. These persons have to draw up a record of the assessment process after it has taken place, following the guidelines laid down in the NABC manual. Quality assurance commissioners are also appointed by the Educational Authority to supervise NABC administration at local level.

Figure 2.8: People in charge of administering national tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice

Additional notes

Ireland: Teachers from the class administer standardised tests in mathematics and English to identify individual learning needs. National sample tests in mathematics and in English are administered by class teachers under the supervision of inspectors.
Lithuania: Other teachers from the same school are responsible for administering optional tests (basic education achievement tests), while external examiners are responsible for administering sample testing ('national studies of student attainment').
United Kingdom (ENG): Compulsory national tests at key stage 1 as well as optional tests are administered by class teachers. Compulsory national tests at key stage 2 are administered by the headteacher and overseen by official bodies' representatives.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests were taken in November 2008 for entry in September 2009.

Explanatory note

The determining factor in identifying types of test was the main objective of each test (see Figure 2.1). The Figure does not differentiate between tests held at ISCED levels 1 or 2 (or both levels). For further information on this point see the Annexe.

In Spain, Austria and Romania, national tests are always administered by persons from outside the school in which they take place. These people are appointed by the national bodies responsible for the organisation of tests, or by external companies contracted for this purpose. The same occurs in the case of examinations for the award of certificates in Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland), as well as in certain monitoring tests in Italy and Lithuania. This also applied to Slovenia until 2005, when the involvement of teachers was perceived to be necessary in a context in which the emphasis in national tests shifted from a focus on awarding certificates, to the monitoring of schools.

National tests may also be administered by teachers from the same school who do not teach the pupils undergoing assessment, as occurs in Bulgaria, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia, and in optional basic education achievement tests in Lithuania. Furthermore in Slovenia, authorised members of the state examination committee, subject committees and experts at the national examination centre may visit a school and attend the testing procedure. Similarly in Portugal, a member of the general education inspectorate may visit schools during the administration of national tests.

In Italy and Poland, teachers from the same school who do not teach the pupils undergoing assessment or teachers from other schools have responsibilities in the administration of tests for the award of certificates. In addition in Poland, the teachers of a particular group of pupils (excluding those who teach the subject tested) play a role in administering tests. In Estonia and the United Kingdom (England), the final examination at basic school and national tests at 'key stage 2' respectively are administered by the headteacher. As the local authority in England is statutorily responsible for

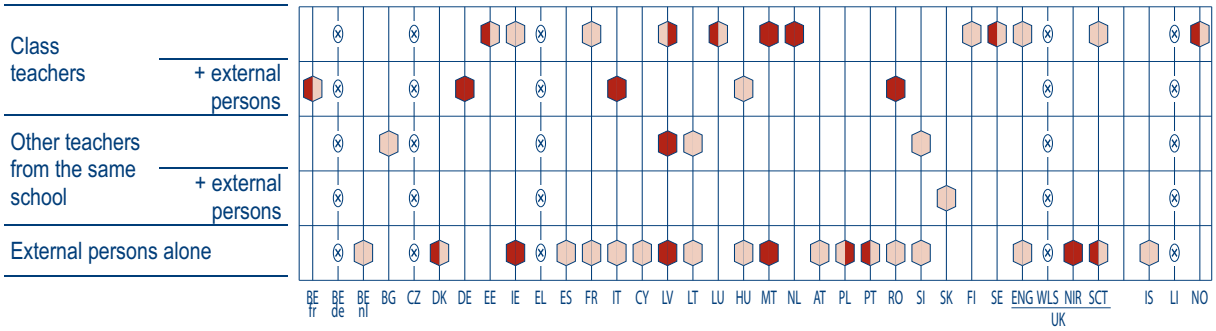
auditing the standards of administration of tests, around 10 % of schools are visited annually to check that the process is properly conducted. The Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) may also make some monitoring visits.

2.3.3. Marking of national tests

In nine countries or regions, the task of marking national tests is always entrusted to external markers who are generally appointed by the body responsible for setting the tests. In 11 other countries or regions some national tests are marked by external personnel, such as teachers who receive special-purpose training.

In Bulgaria, Latvia (in certain tests for the award of certificates), Lithuania (optional basic education achievement tests), Slovenia (national tests in school year 6) and Slovakia, tests are marked by teachers from the school who do not teach the pupils concerned.

Figure 2.9: Persons in charge of marking national tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice

Additional notes

France: So-called *évaluations-bilans* (monitoring assessments) are marked by the Assessment, Prospects and Performance Directorate (DEPP), whereas formative assessments to support personal learning are marked by the teacher.
Latvia: Examinations in Latvian taken at the end of the ninth school year by pupils in schools which implement minority programmes are marked centrally. Other tests for the award of certificates at the end of compulsory education are marked in schools by subject teachers and in some cases by the class teacher too.
Lithuania: Other teachers from the same school are responsible for marking basic education achievement tests (optional), while external examiners are responsible for marking national studies of pupil attainment (sample-based).
Hungary: The NABC for school years 6 and 8 is marked by external persons. The NABC for school year 4 is marked by class teachers, except in tests chosen to form the national representative sample (which are marked by external persons).
Malta: Annual examinations held in primary and secondary schools are marked by teachers, while examinations at the end of primary and compulsory education are the responsibility of external markers appointed by the educational assessment unit in the Ministry of Education and Culture or the examinations board at the University of Malta.
Slovenia: The examinations at the end of the period of compulsory education are marked by teachers engaged specifically for this purpose in assessment centres. The examinations held at the end of the sixth year of compulsory education are marked by teachers from the candidates' school who do not teach the pupils undergoing assessment.
United Kingdom (ENG): Compulsory national tests at key stage 1 as well as optional tests are marked by class teachers. Compulsory national tests at key stage 2 are marked externally.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests were taken in November 2008 for entry in September 2009.
United Kingdom (SCT): Tests undertaken for system monitoring (Scottish Survey of Achievement) are marked by external persons while the 5-14 national tests are marked by teachers.

Explanatory note

The determining factor in identifying types of test was the main objective of each test (see Figure 2.1). The Figure does not differentiate between tests held at ISCED levels 1 or 2 (or both levels). For further information on this point see the Annexe.

It is possible to identify some differences in how tests are marked, which relate to the purpose of each test. For example, tests designed to detect learning needs of individual pupils are marked by class teachers in all countries except Cyprus. In Denmark, such tests are computerised and therefore marked automatically.

In only six countries – Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway – do teachers mark tests which are used to take decisions about the school career of pupils without any external checks taking place. However, tests in the Netherlands consist entirely of multiple-choice questions and are marked automatically. In Sweden, the National Agency for Education is in the process of devising more secure methods of administering and marking tests. In Malta, the annual tests in primary and lower secondary education to determine whether pupils can move on to the following year are the only tests marked by their class teachers. Indeed, the entrance examination for the 'junior lyceums' or tests that qualify pupils for the secondary education certificate are entrusted to external markers.

In other countries in which class teachers mark national tests, various forms of external supervision are used – in addition to the instructions on testing procedures which are issued to schools, along with marking scales or assessment criteria – in order to ensure the broad consistency and reliability of the process. For example, in Belgium (French Community), teachers supervised by inspectors mark the certificate examinations held at the end of primary education, in accordance with instructions compiled by a special working group. In Germany, tests are initially marked by the teacher responsible for teaching the test subject matter. They are then marked for a second time by a teacher qualified in the same subject who is designated by the head teacher inside the same school or from a neighbouring one. In Italy, state examinations at the end of lower secondary education are marked by an exam committee formed from teachers working in the final year of lower secondary school and an external chairperson. In Portugal, the marking process is supervised by specially trained teachers external to the school. In Romania, the tests held at the end of school years 7 and 8 are marked initially by the classroom teacher and then by a person external to the school.

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* *

To sum up, current policies on national testing seem to be pursuing two main aims, by seeking on the one hand, as in the past, to certify individual pupil attainment but also increasingly, on the other, to monitor schools or the entire education system. By contrast, only a minority of countries organise national tests mainly in order to identify individual learning needs. Education authorities either undertake separate tests in pursuit of each aim or, more often, use the same test for several distinct purposes.

The majority of national tests – and especially those with a significant impact on the school career of individual pupils or which help to identify their learning needs – are compulsory, even if optional tests are in practice taken by almost everyone. Sample tests used in general to monitor the education system are also relatively widespread.

As regards the number of school years in which tests are held, European countries organise tests in two to three specific years on average during compulsory education, with several countries testing their pupils more or less frequently.

If we discount tests for the award of certificates – often in many subjects – at the end of lower secondary education, countries fall into two groups in terms of the range of subjects tested. National testing focuses either on just the two main subjects represented by the language of instruction and mathematics, or – as is becoming increasingly common – covers the curriculum more broadly. At present, cross-curricular skills and competences are only rarely tested using standardised resources.

As far as the design of tests is concerned, only a few countries so far have opted for a distinctly cross-curricular approach in constructing test materials. In the majority of countries, pupils answer the same questions in national tests, while only a few adopt varied questions providing for more personalised assessment. ICT is not at present widely used in national testing. Around one-third of the countries surveyed have developed specially adapted tests or test materials to enable pupils with SEN to take part.

Teachers are involved in various stages of national testing. In almost all countries they help to set questions and define marking criteria. Very often, they are involved in administering tests to pupils, and in half of the countries they mark papers. However, increasing computerisation of national testing may in future limit their contribution in these areas.

There is no clear correlation between the aims of tests and how they are administered. External players are no more likely to be responsible for administering tests with a significant impact on the school career of pupils than other types of test. However, evidence of such a correlation is greater in the marking of tests, for which external partners share responsibility almost everywhere.

CHAPTER 3: USES AND IMPACT OF NATIONAL TEST RESULTS

This chapter examines how the results of national tests are used, first, with regard to individual pupils, secondly as regards schools and local authorities and finally in relation to the education system as a whole. It further seeks to report on the main debates arising from the findings of national surveys on the impact of tests. Information on the communication of test results is also included in the chapter.

3.1. Use of national test results with regard to individual pupils

The pupil as an individual is central to the use made of two types of national test, each with distinct aims. The first type is designed to help take decisions about the school career of pupils, while the second is meant to identify and address their learning needs.

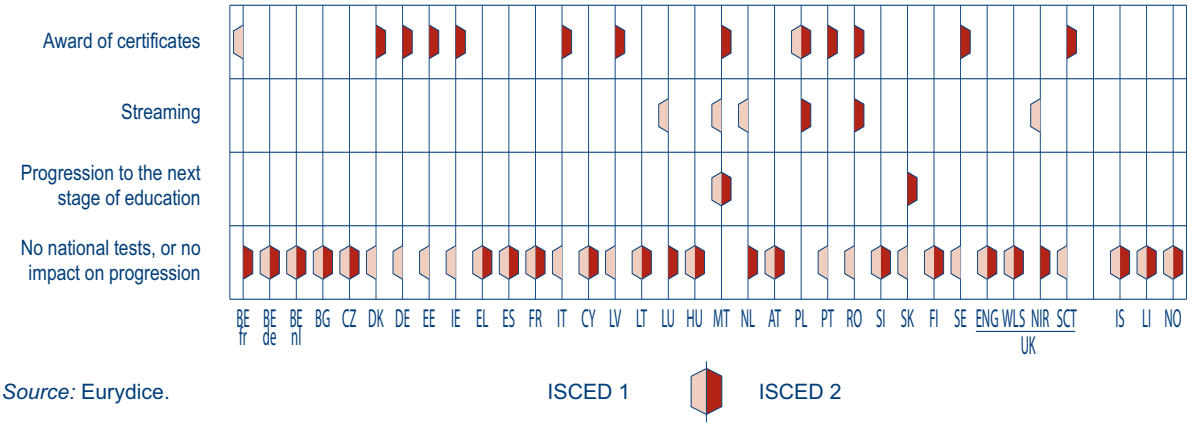
3.1.1. Taking decisions about the school career of pupils

In 16 countries or regions, there is much at stake for pupils in national tests because the results influence their school careers in various ways. Of these countries (or regions), Malta is the only one in which pupils (at ISCED levels 1 and 2) have to sit more than one test whose results are taken into account in qualifying them to move on to the next class. Malta uses national tests for this purpose in every class from year five of primary education onwards. It is also the only country which stipulates that schools should use the results of tests to place pupils in different ability groups in years five and six of primary education.

In most cases in which the results of national tests influence the career of pupils, they are the basis for awarding certificates at the end of primary or lower secondary education (or both). In such instances, the results are usually considered in conjunction with work done by pupils during the year or with a final internal examination. However, in Belgium (the French Community), the results of the test at the end of primary school are the sole determinant of access to secondary education. That said, if a pupil fails the test an alternative procedure exists whereby the results are disregarded. In this case, a panel comprising the head teacher and teachers who have taught the pupil in the last two years of primary education may award the primary school leaving certificate on the basis of the marks obtained by him or her over the preceding two years, and other factors.

In Poland and Romania, the results of national tests are not used just in the award of certificates, as they play a part too in streaming pupils within the various forms of schooling on offer. This was also the case in Iceland up to 2007/08. In Poland, national examinations at the end of lower secondary education count for 50 % of the points that are the basis for recruitment into the different types of upper secondary schools. Achieving a poor result may lead to orientation towards short cycle vocational education. In Romania, the average of the marks obtained by pupils in four subjects in national tests during the final two years of lower secondary education is taken into account in determining whether they move on to an academic or a vocational school. Until 2007/08 in Iceland, the marks awarded by schools for work done in the final year of compulsory education and the national test results were combined in the certificate qualifying a pupil for upper secondary education in either an academic or vocational institution. However, this streaming function of test results was abolished in 2009. From the autumn of 2009, tests are taking place at the beginning of the final year of compulsory education and will be used to help pupils achieve the learning outcomes recommended for its completion.

Figure 3.1: How national test results guide decisions concerning the school career of pupils, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

France: A written examination with content standardised at national level is organised in several subjects for the award of the national certificate (the *brevet*) at the end of lower secondary education. Despite the existence of central procedures for administering and marking this examination, it cannot be regarded as a form of nationally standardised testing, given the wide variety of practices adopted in marking and interpreting its results.
Poland: At the end of primary school, pupils are obliged to sit an external test which has a diagnostic rather than a selective function. However, participation in the test is in all cases an essential precondition for the completion of primary school and admission to lower secondary school.
Slovakia: Pupils with a 90 % success rate in each subject in the national test held at the end of lower secondary education can be admitted to upper secondary school without taking an entrance examination. The test will be a requirement for admission to upper secondary education in the future.
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in November 2008 for 2009 entry.
Iceland: 2007/08 was the last year in which test results were used to award certificates at the end of compulsory education and to stream pupils for general or vocational education.

Explanatory note

Where test results are taken into account in certifying the learning outcomes achieved on completion of a particular level of education, they automatically help to determine whether pupils progress to the next stage. However, the category 'progression to the next stage of education' applies solely to tests whose results are not used in the award of certificates.

With effect from 2009/10 in Bulgaria, a national test held in the seventh year of compulsory schooling will not just help to determine whether pupils gain access to upper secondary education, but also be used to establish pupil rankings affecting the choice of school. For now, Slovenia is the only country with regulations stating that the results of national tests may affect access to upper secondary schools whose enrolment capacity fails to meet the demand for places. This kind of selection is subject to parental consent and occurred to a very limited extent for 2008/09.

In Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands, the results of national tests have significant implications for the school career of pupils in terms of streaming, although they are not taken into account in awarding them certificates. And until 2008/09 the same applied to the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland). In Luxembourg, the results obtained by pupils in standardised tests at the end of primary education are one of five criteria examined for pupil orientation, along with their exercise books, class work and report book, and the teacher's opinion of them. In Malta, pupils have to pass an entrance examination to enrol in a 'junior lyceum', while general secondary schools admit those who have not sat one or failed it. In 2010/11, the selective examination at the end of primary education is being

phased out and replaced by a national examination certifying the level of attainment. In the Netherlands, the test results of pupils are discussed in consultation between the school and their parents on the most appropriate type of secondary education. Although the test itself is not compulsory, in practice it is taken by nearly all pupils. Secondary school heads also consider the marks obtained by those wishing to enrol in their school. While no official national survey has ever identified any negative effects arising from these tests, arguments against them are heard in schools every year. Besides emphasising the undue attention devoted to these tests in classroom teaching and the stress they can cause for pupils, such arguments challenge the principle of selection at the start of secondary education. In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), tests designed to select pupils before they enter secondary education had long been held in the final year of primary school. However they are being abolished with effect from September 2009. For 2010 entry, schools are recommended not to use academic criteria but are not precluded by the Department of Education from doing so.

3.1.2. Identification of individual learning needs

In around a third of countries (see figure 2.1), teachers use some national tests to identify the individual learning needs of pupils. Teachers may then define objectives, adopt teaching strategies and plan learning activities on the basis of their conclusions. These tests are not used to take decisions about the school career of pupils and are generally compulsory (see Chapter 2).

In France, for example, the results of so-called 'diagnostic assessments' enable teachers to form *groupes de besoin* (groups of pupils) for whom personalised assistance and progress programmes are put in place. Furthermore, the same results are a form of self-assessment for pupils, who can respond to them by adapting their learning methods, and they are also communicated to their parents. In Cyprus, tests held at the end of primary education are used to identify pupils at risk of developing functional illiteracy in reading and mathematics by the end of compulsory education. Pupils identified as such receive extra support in accordance with specially designed programmes in lower secondary education. In the United Kingdom (England), compulsory tests at the end of ‘key stage 1’ (year 2) are used to help inform the final teacher assessment judgement reported for each child, which takes into account the child’s progress and performance throughout the key stage. The optional tests taken at ISCED levels 1 and 2 allow schools to monitor the year-on-year progress of pupils against a national benchmark and prepare them for statutory tests. Schools are not obliged to report test results to parents. In Scotland, the results of the National 5-14 Assessment Bank are used to help support learning by confirming teacher assessments of class work.

The precise timing of tests differs from one country to the next (see Chapter 2). In certain cases, they take place at the beginning or middle of the school year, thereby enabling teachers to take suitable follow-up measures during the year. Formative tests may also be held at the end of the school year. If pupils in these countries do not continue with the same teacher, there is generally a proper mechanism for communicating their results to the one who takes over the following year.

Guidelines and resources that offer support in interpreting results and initiating appropriate remedial activities are available in Belgium (French Community), Denmark, France and Slovenia. The French Community of Belgium runs continuing professional development programmes for teachers on analysing and exploiting the results of external assessment of pupil attainment. Analysis focuses more on the level of the class than on individual pupils. Similarly in Luxembourg, teachers use national test

results provided in aggregated form at both class and school level, in order to establish remedial measures.

3.2. Use of national test results to inform school policy

It is a widespread practice among countries in Europe to provide information enabling schools to measure themselves against the national average results achieved by pupils in national tests, and to make improvements on the basis of that comparison. This is true of most national tests designed to monitor schools or the education system as a whole. Yet it does not apply to Spain, France, Ireland, or the United Kingdom (Scotland). In these four countries, the results of national tests which are intended to monitor the education system as a whole and administered to samples of pupils or schools, are not aggregated for the schools involved.

Situations also occur in which sample-based tests can be taken by schools not in the sample, which then receive a report on their school level results. An example from Belgium (Flemish Community) is cited below (section 3.2.1). In Lithuania, the results of the 'national studies of student attainment' are not aggregated systematically for schools included in the chosen sample. However, local authorities opting to conduct extensive municipal-level testing receive a comparative report in which the performance of separate schools is presented. In most cases, municipalities decide to communicate these separate results to schools.

It is also common practice, in the case of pupil-centred tests, to provide schools with aggregated information showing them where they stand in relation to national performance data. However Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta do not provide schools with this information when tests have a significant impact on the school career of pupils. Of those countries which hold tests to identify individual learning needs (see Figure 2.1), Denmark, Ireland, Cyprus and the United Kingdom (England) do not aggregate the results for schools. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), the results of the National 5-14 Assessment Bank are not aggregated centrally by the Scottish government, but there may be a means of comparison with other local schools if the local education authority so decides (see 3.2.2 below).

Aggregated data at school and national level are often supplemented by results enabling schools to compare themselves to other schools with similar characteristics in terms of school population and class structures, etc. However in the great majority of cases, schools either have to conduct their comparison without access to the individual results achieved by other schools, or use anonymous results. Individual school results in national tests are published in few countries (see Figure 3.3). And although schools in Norway do have online access to the results of national tests, enabling their own results to be viewed in relation to those of other schools, the data are not presented in comparative form.

Where schools receive the results of national tests in the form of aggregated figures for the school and aggregated national data, they may use this information as a basis for action to improve their own quality. This is termed the 'mirror effect' ([1]). Whether this is actually done depends on the perceptions of local players regarding the value of such an exercise and on their own priorities. The process may

([1]) See Thélot C. and Mons N., op cit.

also be framed by education policies which encourage or advise schools to analyse the test results and adapt their practices. This involves examining the recommendations as to how the results should be taken into account in internal school evaluation, considered during external evaluation and then published for each individual school.

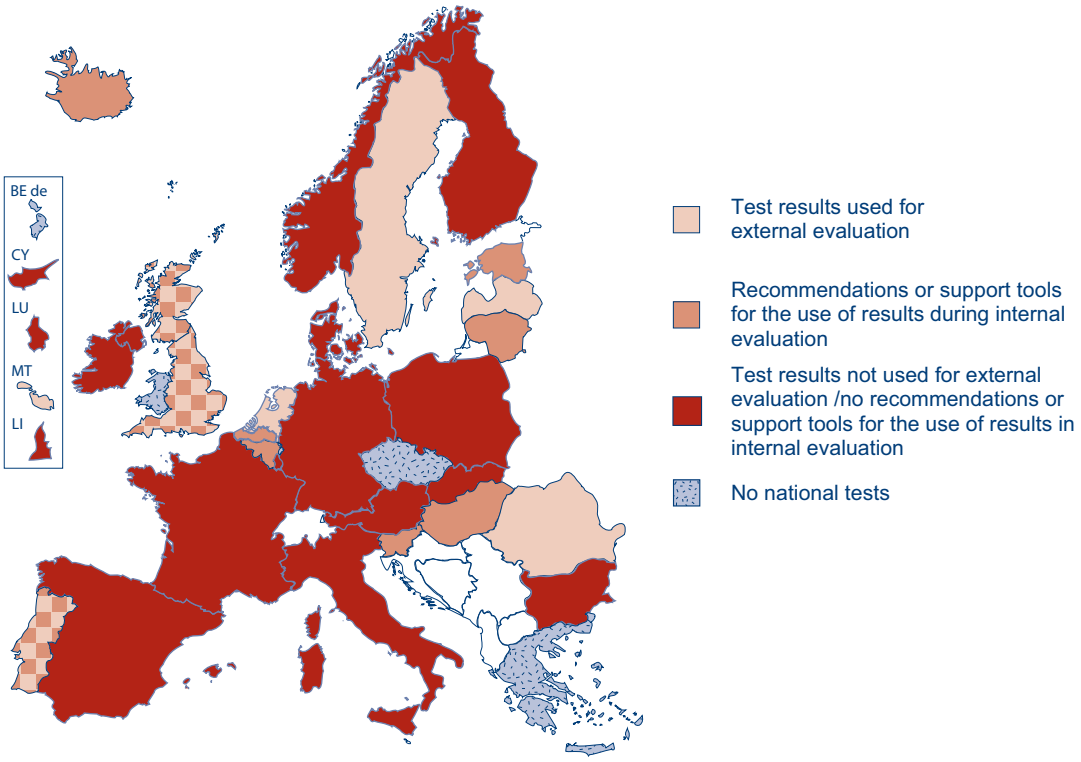
3.2.1. Use of test results in school evaluation

Two-thirds of the countries considered have national tests whose results are aggregated for individual schools and for the whole country. In eight of these countries there are regulations, recommendations or resources for support that relate to the **use of test results during internal school evaluation** (see Figure 3.2). In Belgium (the French Community), Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, the United Kingdom (England and Scotland) and Iceland, the central authorities expect schools to carry out an internal process of quality analysis based on their results in certain national tests. Moreover in Hungary since 2008, low achieving schools in national tests have had to prepare and implement an action plan based on the possible causes of low achievement.

In the United Kingdom, the requirement on the internal process of quality analysis covers not only the test results but also other pupil performance data. In England, however, the major element in accountability for secondary schools is the results of tests which are beyond the scope of this study, namely public examinations held at the end of ISCED level 3.

As far as support is concerned, tools designed to assist in the process of internal evaluation, including performance indicators for national tests, have been made available to schools by central and local authorities in the United Kingdom (England and Scotland). This kind of resource also exists in Portugal, although only at class level. Teachers have access to information regarding each item and the competences involved. In Belgium (the French Community), the inspectorates and educational advisers lend their support to schools for the exercise of internal analysis that the latter are required to conduct. Although tests in Belgium (the Flemish Community) are sample-based, all schools can – with effect from 2009 – decide to take a parallel version of the test and receive a school feedback report for use in their self-evaluation. In Slovenia, the national examination centre provides schools with guidelines for the analysis of results. In Lithuania, the education authorities have developed a system of internal evaluation which gives schools the option of treating the results of their own pupils and those from other schools as indicators of learning attainment.

Figure 3.2: Use of test results in school evaluation, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Belgium (BE fr): Information relates to the compulsory tests in years 2 and 5 of primary education, and year 2 of secondary education. The 2008/09 tests have been postponed until 2009/10.
Hungary: Regulations on consideration of test results during school internal evaluation relate to national assessment of basic competences for school years 6 and 8.
Malta: School external evaluation takes results of all national tests into account, with the exception of the secondary education certificate examination.
United Kingdom (ENG): The test results considered through external evaluation of schools relate to national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 2 (year 6).
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in November 2008 for 2009 entry.
United Kingdom (SCT): During school external evaluation, results of the Scottish Survey of Achievement and National Qualifications are considered, but not results of the National 5-14 Assessment Bank.

In eight countries, the **external evaluation of schools** or head teachers takes account of the results achieved by pupils in national tests.

In Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom (England and Scotland), the results of national tests, aggregated for each school, are considered by the central education authorities in the evaluation or auditing of schools. In Portugal, schools with weak results in standardised tests at ISCED level 1 are required to prepare a set of corrective measures and specify their timing. They also propose extra support to underperforming children.

In the United Kingdom, test results are also one of the criteria used in local authority evaluations of schools. In Hungary too, school governors have to incorporate into their evaluation reports school results in national assessments of basic competences.

In Slovenia, one of the criteria used by the Ministry of Education and Sport in assessing head teachers is the inclusion, in their school's internal evaluation report, of an analysis of its results in the national tests. A policy of establishing school accountability on the basis of test results could also be emerging in Italy, in accordance with new assessment procedures to be implemented from 2009/10. The Ministry of Education has asked for procedures for the external and internal assessment of school management and teachers to be devised with due regard for the results of pupils in national tests. These results will be compared with measurements of the ability levels of pupils when they were newly enrolled in their school, with the aim of assessing its added value.

3.2.2. Publication of test results for each school

In the great majority of European countries, the aggregated results of national tests for each school are not publicised. In some countries, official documents state clearly that national tests cannot be used to rank schools. This applies to Belgium (the French Community), France in the case of *évaluations-bilans* (summative assessments), Luxembourg, Austria and Slovenia. In Finland, there was strong pressure from the media to publish school rankings, but the national consensus in the ensuing debate was against publicising test results.

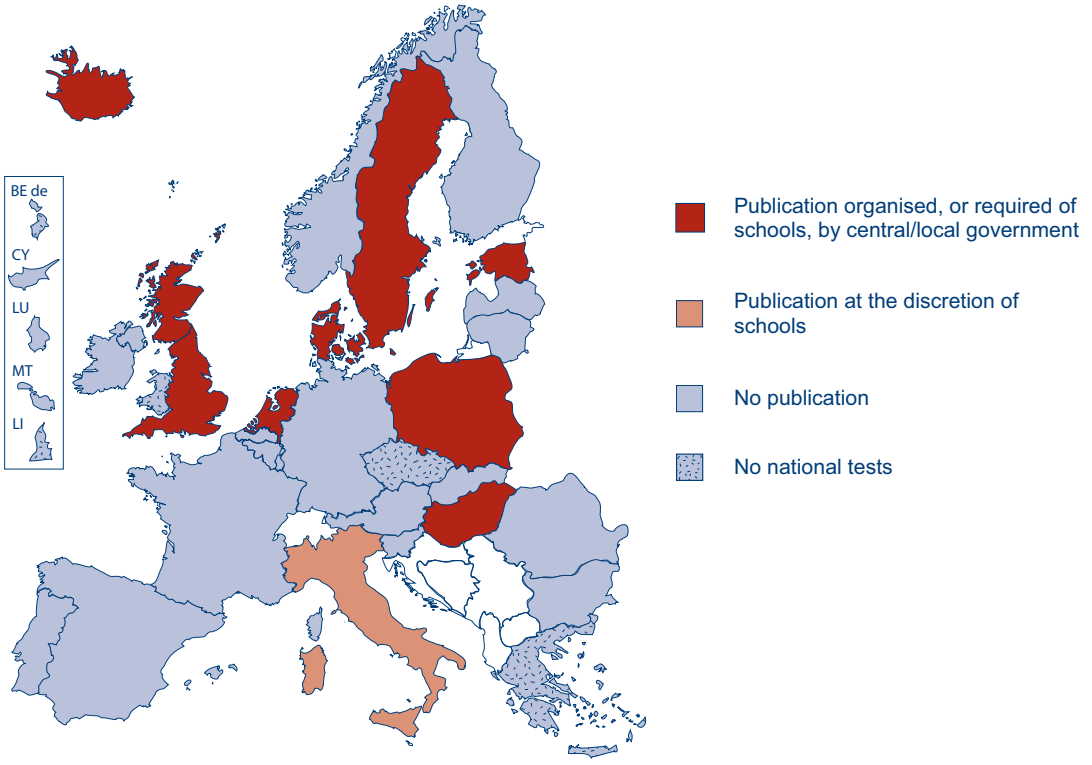
Only a few countries arrange for central government publication of results for each school, or recommend local publication. Such information is published by the ministries of education in Denmark, Hungary, Poland and Iceland, and by the National Agency for Education in Sweden. In the Netherlands, the inspectorate publishes individual school results. Schools may also choose to include in their information leaflet the average marks obtained by their pupils in national tests. In Estonia, schools are expected to publicise the aggregated test results of their pupils.

Central education authorities present the published results of individual schools in several ways. They may be published as raw data as in the case of Sweden, or with weighted indicators depending on the characteristics of the pupil population or the added value of schools, as in Iceland. They may even combine both types of information as in the United Kingdom (England) for tests at the end of 'key stage 2' (year 6). Here, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families publishes comparative lists of schools in alphabetical order, showing their results in compulsory national tests held at the end of primary education in order to enable parents to make a fully informed choice of school for their children. The same procedure was adopted for tests at the end of lower secondary education until 2007/08. Schools are also required to publish their results in national tests held at the end of 'key stage 2' in the information brochures they produce for parents, and to set and publish targets for the percentage of their pupils expected to achieve the middle level in national tests.

The publication of national school test results, which began in the 1990s, very quickly drew criticism targeting the inadequacy of the lists for measuring the effectiveness of schools. In fact, the lists demonstrated that schools in wealthy areas were achieving far better results than those in poor areas. There was a demand for lists which showed the improvement made by schools in pupil performance levels between two different points in time. Following an investigation of the system of national tests

conducted by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee in 2007 ([2]), the Committee also called for the comparative lists of national test results to provide a broader range of information on each school. The lists are considered to be too simplistic to enable parents to form an opinion about the activities of particular schools.

Figure 3.3: Publication of individual school results in national tests, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Denmark: The published results relate to the certificate assessments which take place at the end of compulsory education.
Hungary: The published results relate to the national assessment of basic competences in school years 6 and 8.
Portugal: The Ministry of Education does not publish the average results per school in the national tests. However, in the case of the national examination at the end of compulsory education, the Ministry does publish on the Internet the results obtained by each of the pupils at each school (while preserving their anonymity).
United Kingdom (ENG): The published results relate to national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 2 (year 6).
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in November 2008 for 2009 entry.
United Kingdom (SCT): Local authorities may choose to publish their 5-14 test results; central government arranges the publication of the results of certificate examinations taken at the age of 16, the end of the lower secondary 'cycle'.

In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), the publication of lists showing school results in national tests was discontinued in 2001, following consultation organised by the Department of Education.

In the United Kingdom (Scotland), the government does not publish school league tables based on results obtained in the certificate examinations held at the end of lower secondary education.

([2]) House of Commons, Children, Schools and Families Committee, Testing and Assessment, Third Report of Session 2007-08, Vol.1.

However, the results for each school are available on the government website. The press are allowed to use these data if they wish to produce their own school league tables. Local authorities ask their schools to publish the results they achieve in the National 5-14 Assessment Bank in their school handbook for parents. They may also choose to publish the results of the 5-14 tests in their schools, or use them comparatively within the authority to encourage school self-evaluation. Here again, the press are entitled to obtain this information from a local authority and publish it.

Finally, schools in Italy are entirely free to publicise their results in national tests as much as they wish.

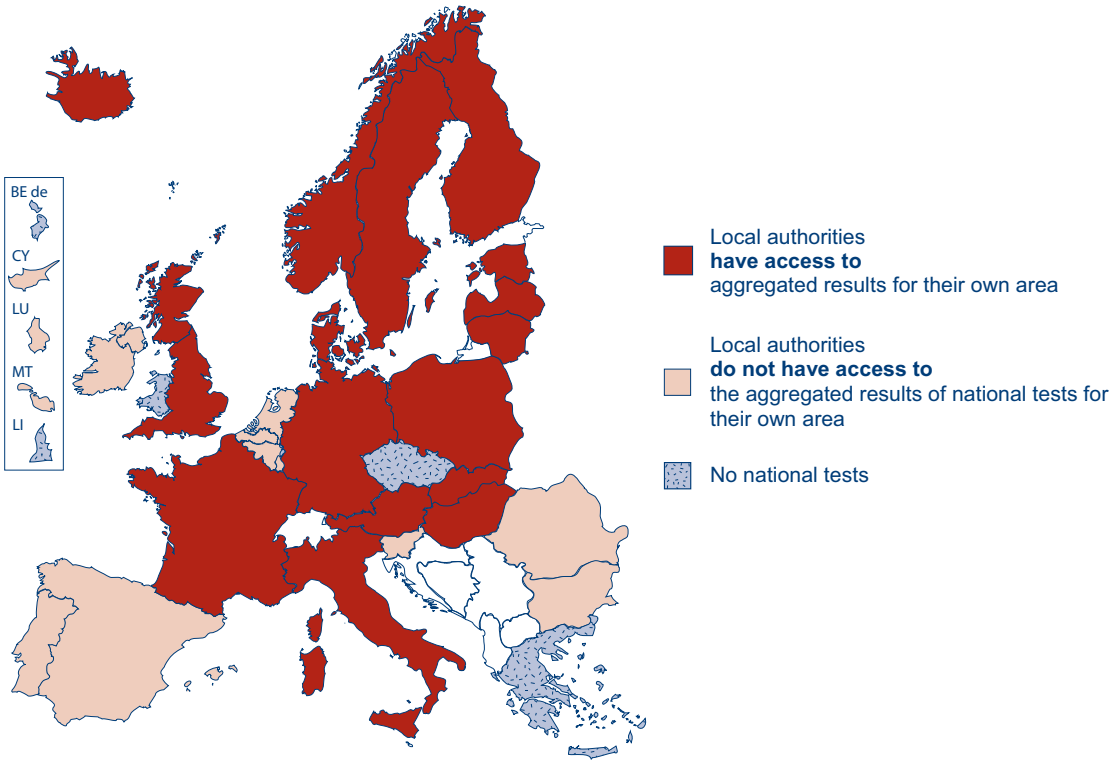
3.3. Use of test results by local authorities

Local authorities exercise responsibilities in the field of education in several European countries and especially the Nordic countries. In about half of European countries, these authorities systematically obtain aggregated test results for their own area and generally use them to adapt their education policies accordingly. In Denmark, local results are published in the case of the certificate examination held at the end of compulsory education. The Norwegian White Paper on Quality in Education dating from June 2008 proposes that local authorities be made more accountable for the results obtained by their schools, and that it should be made easier for the former to use these results for school monitoring. It suggests that each municipality should draw up an annual report on the results obtained by its schools.

As regards national tests designed for education system monitoring and administered to samples of pupils, Lithuania and the United Kingdom (Scotland) have developed systems enabling local authorities to increase the size of the sample within their territory in order to obtain statistically significant data for their own area. Local authorities that have opted for this system receive a targeted report from the central authorities on their relative performance.

In the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Hungary, the results of tests administered to identify individual learning needs are not gathered centrally, although partial collection occurs in Hungary. However, some local authorities – or maintainers of institutions in the case of Hungary – require their schools to submit pupils' results for monitoring purposes. In Italy and Finland, data on test results for each local authority are not produced centrally either, but some local authorities aggregate the results obtained by their own schools; in Italy, these are used to determine the content of continuing professional development programmes for teachers and head teachers.

Figure 3.4: Communication of the results of national tests to local authorities, ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Additional notes

Denmark: The information relates to the national certificate examinations at the end of compulsory education.
France: The information relates to diagnostic assessments for individual learning needs.
Lithuania: In the 'national studies of student attainment', information applies solely to municipalities which participate in the national studies as a separate sample. Aggregated results of basic education achievement tests are available to municipalities on request.
United Kingdom (ENG): The information relates to the compulsory national tests that are administered at the end of the second key stage of compulsory education (year 6).
United Kingdom (NIR): The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in November 2008 for 2009 entry.
United Kingdom (SCT): The information relates to national tests designed to monitor the performance of the system as a whole (Scottish Survey of Achievements), as well as to the results of the national certificate examinations at the end of compulsory schooling.
Norway: The information relates to national monitoring tests which are held twice in the course of compulsory schooling.

3.4. Use of test results by national governments or top-level education authorities

In virtually all countries, the results of certain national tests are aggregated for the education system as a whole and published as part of a report on the state of the system. Besides tests designed from the outset for system monitoring purposes, this often applies to tests used to guide decisions concerning the school career of pupils, as well as those designed to identify their individual learning needs. Only Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania and Norway do not produce an annual report on the state of the education system on the basis of the results of high stakes tests for pupils, while Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) do not gather the results of tests to identify individual learning needs, for inclusion in national reports.

Reports on the state of the whole education system which incorporate the results of national tests may also contain data for regional entities. For example in Spain in 2009, such reports will start to present results broken down by Autonomous Community, comparing the attainment levels of each Community.

National reports often contain comparisons of test results over time and analyse background factors liable to affect pupil performance levels, such as population characteristics or aspects of the school infrastructure. These reports are meant to support policy-making at the national or highest level of responsibility and, in a broader context, to feed into current debate in the world of education. They may also make the education system more accountable to parents and the general public. Reports are made available to the main policy-makers in the field of education and various national bodies with educational responsibilities, and published online by education ministries or agencies responsible for national tests. Some countries have also defined procedures for discussing national test results with various stakeholders in the education sector and for subsequent joint decision-making on improvement measures.

For example in Belgium (the Flemish Community), the minister of education organises a written consultation process on test results, for the benefit of teachers and others in education. The questions put to them deal with lessons and explanations derived from the results, the identification of shortcomings and possible future areas of improvement. The replies are collated in a document and presented at a conference on the quality of the education system for a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Published and distributed to all schools and stakeholders, the conclusions of the conference relate to various levels of action. They may focus, for example, on a revision of attainment targets, the development of new programmes, continuing professional development or school evaluation policies.

In France, communications and conferences on the results of monitoring tests may be initiated at the request of teachers, researchers, parents or trade unions, etc. In Slovenia, the national examination centre stages annual seminars to present the results of national tests to all teachers in compulsory education. In Romania, a presentation session on the results of the national tests (school year 4) was held in 2007 as a continuing professional development activity for all primary school inspectors.

In several European countries, national tests have been an important means of drawing attention to disparities in the attainment levels of pupils and schools, as well as to factors that may contribute to such differences. In Spain, test results have been taken into account in several education laws

devoted primarily to measures to combat school failure and cut dropout rates. In France, the results of the monitoring tests serve chiefly to regulate policies such as those designed to combat underachievement, and a *réseau ambition réussite* ('ambition and success network') has been created to support the schools most seriously affected by this problem. In Ireland, the results of the national tests in English and mathematics (NAER and NAMA) have underlain policies for the support of pupils from poor backgrounds. In Norway, the June 2008 White Paper on Quality in Education proposed that the government should use the results of the national tests as a basis for the provision of support to schools returning poor results.

Other aspects of national education policies, which are linked to the aims of study programmes, have also been the subject of reforms in the wake of national test results. They include the content of some subjects in the national curriculum in Belgium (the Flemish Community), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania; the time allocations for particular subjects in Finland; the common knowledge and competences base in France; continuing professional development programmes in Belgium (the French Community); and the use of teaching materials in Estonia. Action plans in particular subject areas have also been drawn up to improve national performance levels, as in Portugal which launched its action plan for mathematics in 2006/07 and for Portuguese in 2007.

3.5. Surveys and debates

Some countries refer to debates or national surveys on the unintended effects of national tests ([3]). In these countries, tests are likely to have significant consequences for schools, for example when individual school results are either published or taken into consideration in school evaluation. The most common unintended consequences of tests are an overemphasis on aspects of the subjects to be tested in classroom teaching, even though the tests cover only a very small part of the curriculum (see Chapter 2).

In Denmark, for example, a survey conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute in 2002 found that the subjects covered by national tests for the certificate awarded at the end of compulsory education – and particularly Danish and mathematics – were considered more important than other subjects, such as history, biology and geography. As a result, schools were assigning higher priority to the continuing professional development of staff who taught subjects that featured in the national tests. By contrast in Sweden, most of the teachers who took part in a survey conducted by the National Agency for Education in 2004 stated that they did not adapt teaching to take account of the content of tests. In the Netherlands, inspectors observed that some schools were choosing not to administer CITO tests to weak pupils in the last year of primary school, who would enter remedial education the following year. In this way, schools sought to keep their average marks high and hence protect their image.

In the United Kingdom (England), national tests have been the subject of much debate since they were first introduced. The case for these tests was summed up in an article written in 1993 by the minister for school standards of that time in the face of pressure from the National Union of Teachers, which was threatening to boycott the tests. According to the minister, national tests had introduced standards and objectives which had served to raise the expectation levels of schools and teachers regarding pupil performance. They had also been an instrument of greater social equality in the sense

([3]) For more information on the impact of national tests on education systems, see Mons N., op cit.

that most pupils who received assistance on the basis of their test results came from poor backgrounds. Lastly, they served to identify the most gifted pupils. Opponents of the national tests believe that they can demotivate pupils and increase their anxiety levels, that they are not really in the interests of parents and pupils, and that they lead to the teaching effort being focused on drilling pupils to pass the tests. Not least of all, they diminish the importance of the teacher's judgement of his or her pupils because of the great importance that the public attaches to the results of the national tests at the end of each 'key stage'. An inquiry into the system of national tests undertaken in 2007 by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee ([4]) revealed that many teachers felt obliged to attach undue importance to those aspects of the curriculum that were liable to feature in the tests, and to focus too much attention on pupils who seemed capable of achieving the performance targets set by the government.

In the United Kingdom (Wales and Northern Ireland), similar debates took place and resulted in less importance being assigned to national testing within the overall system of pupil assessment (see Chapter 1). Although in the United Kingdom (England) tests remain at the end of 'key stages' 1 and 2 (pupils aged 7 and 11), they have been abolished since the 2008/09 school year in 'key stage 3' (pupils aged 14). A new expert group of head teachers and education professionals has been set up to advise on the details of new arrangements for this age group, and in particular whether it is feasible to introduce national sampling in 'key stage 3'. Even though tests remain in 'key stage 1', they play a supporting role in the statutory teacher assessment process. While there are continued calls (from some of the teaching unions) for 'key stage 2' tests to be abolished, the government is committed to their continued use as the key source of information for parents and the public about standards in primary schools, so that the performance of the education system as a whole can still be monitored by the public, year on year.

In the United Kingdom (Scotland), national consultations on the tests took place in 2000 and 2003. They revealed concerns on the part of the government, the academic community and schools about the significance of the influence of national tests on the thinking of local authorities and head teachers, an influence that was reflected in a narrowing of pupils' experiences in terms of the curriculum and educational methodology. These concerns were taken into account in the national programme entitled 'assessment is for learning' launched in the early 2000s. It reminded teachers that they should limit the role of testing to a partial confirmation of their own summative assessments of individual pupil attainment.

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([4]) House of Commons, op cit.

In around half of the countries considered, it may be concluded that national tests are an important element in the education of pupils because their test results are used to determine their school careers. However, it is noticeable that varying degrees of importance are attached to these tests from one country to another. This is discernible in the frequency of tests at ISCED levels 1 and 2, in the fact that the results of tests may be the sole factor determining the next step in the school careers of pupils – or only one of several factors, alongside class work or internal examinations – and in the implications of test results in terms of whether they qualify pupils for the next level or consign them to a particular type of schooling for that next stage. As regards this last aspect, the role of some national tests in streaming pupils across various forms of schooling has recently been ended, or is about to be terminated in some countries.

Besides the proven importance of national tests for pupils, the most tangible evidence of action taken in response to test results is to be found in the domain of national education policies.

It is also noticeable that European countries have different conceptions of the process of quality improvement which is launched following the analysis of test results. Some countries assign priority to national analysis of results, because they practise sample testing or do not register details of the performance of local players. Accordingly, any reforms stemming from those results will necessarily be enacted nationally. Besides producing national reports, many countries also focus on the actions of local players by providing them with test data so that they can undertake comparative work and consequent remedial action. Some of these countries publish results achieved at school level, or take them into account in external evaluation and so encourage schools to keep analysing test results and striving to improve them.

Finally, in several of the countries in which there is much at stake for pupils or schools in national tests, a number of debates and investigations have highlighted their unforeseen effects.

KEY ISSUES

Pupil assessment in all EU countries takes different forms and comprises a variety of assessment instruments and methods which may be internal or external, summative or formative. Although the precise function and significance of these various instruments differs, they form part of an overall structure and contribute to the same basic aims of measuring the progress achieved by pupils and generating information intended to improve learning. The most common type of pupil assessment undertaken during compulsory education is continuous assessment by teachers, which has a number of important advantages. However, its results are not readily comparable and this is one of the main reasons why nationally standardised tests are being increasingly developed to meet the need for standardised data on pupil performance for the validation of learning and performance monitoring.

Standardised tests are shaped by and evolve in accordance with national policy agendas and educational structures. They have emerged as an important instrument in education policy and are used for measuring and monitoring the performance of individual pupils, schools and education systems.

In the 2008/09 school year, only Belgium (the German-speaking Community), the Czech Republic, Greece, the United Kingdom (Wales) and Liechtenstein did not administer national tests. Several other countries have not yet completed the full implementation of their national test systems (Chapter 1, Figure 1.1). Since the 1990s the use of national tests has been gradually expanding, and this could be linked to several parallel developments in European education systems, including the trend towards decentralisation and increasing school autonomy, school choice policies and the greater attention paid to monitoring the quality of education. The significance of national tests continues to evolve and in the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) they are now being assigned a less important role in the overall system of assessment.

In various countries across Europe, national testing is felt to be necessary to provide a comparable and standardised measure of educational attainment. Debate usually centres on the content, form and organisation of tests and on how their results are used. A key issue is the need to ensure the validity and fitness-for-purpose of national tests including their technical accuracy, objectivity and cost-effectiveness. The development of such tests is usually entrusted to a specialised public agency, which performs its tasks in consultation with ministry officials, teachers and university experts. Testing instruments and procedures are regularly reviewed in an attempt to identify the methods most likely to guarantee reliable test results while remaining readily adaptable to the changing needs of European education systems.

Comparative analysis of the aims and organisation of these tests (Chapter 2), as well as of the use of their results (Chapter 3), reveals significant diversity in national testing systems. Several important conclusions can be drawn regarding Europe-wide patterns and trends which in turn may be linked to policy issues often raised in national debates on assessment.

Single or multiple objectives for national tests?

Current policies on national testing seem to focus on two main objectives: the first is the more traditional one of certifying individual pupil attainment, while the second – which is assuming increasing significance – is that of monitoring schools or the education system as a whole. By contrast, a smaller number of countries organise national tests to support classroom learning for formative purposes (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1).

Education authorities either undertake separate tests in pursuit of each objective or, more commonly, exploit the same test for several distinct purposes. For example, this occurs when test results which are used to validate attainment or for formative purposes are also employed in school or system monitoring, or when the results of sample tests administered primarily in order to monitor the entire education system are sent back to participating schools to help them improve their work.

However, experts in assessment have warned that the use of a single test for several purposes might be inappropriate where the information ideally required in each case is not the same. For example this might be the situation when a testing system designed primarily to measure pupil attainment is also used by schools or teachers to comply with accountability requirements, or when formative and summative objectives are attributed to the same test.

Balancing the need for performance data against the risk of over-testing

An ongoing debate among policy makers and education professionals is centred on the need to find the right balance between the legitimate aim of providing an up-to-date picture of pupil attainment and the potentially negative effects of testing on pupils and teachers, and especially the impact of tests on effective teaching time, time devoted to broader curricula objectives, and on stress and motivation.

European countries organise national tests in an average of between two and three separate school years during compulsory education, without necessarily testing each pupil in a given year. Certain countries test their pupils significantly more or less often than that average (Chapter 2, Figure 2.2). Thus in Denmark, Malta and the United Kingdom (Scotland), pupils may take up to eleven or ten national tests, whereas in Germany, the Netherlands and Slovakia there is only one national test during compulsory education.

The great majority of national tests in Europe are compulsory for all pupils in a given cohort and, where tests are optional, they are often taken by virtually everyone. Not surprisingly, tests for the award of certificates or for identifying individual learning needs fall into this category. Sample tests that are usually used for monitoring purposes are also relatively widespread. The decision to test the whole cohort or only a sample clearly depends on the aims of a test. Whole cohort tests are suitable for ascertaining and certifying individual pupil attainment. Sample tests, on the other hand, provide fairly reliable data for the monitoring of national performance while not significantly increasing the burden on pupils and teachers.

The impact on teaching and possible narrowing of the curriculum

As regards the range of tested subjects, national testing is often concerned with just the two core subjects of the language of instruction and mathematics, supplemented in some countries by science or a foreign language, or both. Aside from tests for the award of certificates at the end of lower secondary education, only a minority of countries consistently test pupils more broadly across the curriculum. One of the limitations of many national tests, therefore, is that they assess pupil attainment with respect to just a fraction of the curriculum. However, several countries have announced plans to widen the number of subjects tested annually, while others rotate the subjects tested over successive yearly cycles. Furthermore, a few countries have adopted a distinctive 'competence-oriented' approach to testing, while several others test certain cross-curricular skills.

A further concern is how to counter some potentially undesirable effects of testing, such as the tendency to adapt or restrict teaching to those aspects of the curriculum that are tested, or to place excessive emphasis on purely test-taking skills. Such effects may be especially marked where high stakes for pupils or students, but also for teachers and schools are involved.

Combining test results with other assessments when much is at stake

The majority of European countries organise national tests which are highly significant for pupils, as the results feed into decisions regarding their subsequent school careers. In most of these cases, the results are considered in conjunction with those of other assessments, most notably continuous teacher assessment and internal examinations. This approach enables teachers to have a say in decisions affecting their pupils. It also combines the strengths of several assessment instruments, and addresses the concern that national tests tend to represent a snapshot of pupil attainment at one particular time and in only a few areas.

Use of test results in improving schools and monitoring the quality of education

The results of national tests are used for several purposes which include the monitoring of standards, providing feedback to pupils and parents, and guiding the activity of teachers. In all countries, tests also play an important role in policy development and their results are analysed when formulating measures to deal with disparities in attainment levels, develop the curriculum or improve the continuing professional development of teachers.

Many European countries provide schools with their aggregated test results for comparison with the national average. In general, schools are left to decide how they will use these results to improve their work. However, in twelve countries, there are requirements or recommendations that test results should be considered in external and/or internal evaluation of schools. In comparison with some non-European countries, such as the United States and Canada, test results in Europe are only rarely used as an accountability tool which involves sanctions and rewards and may affect resource allocation.

Furthermore, most European countries do not publish the aggregated test results of individual schools (Chapter 3, Figure 3.3). In some countries official documents expressly forbid the use of results to draw up comparative school league tables or rankings, as these are considered unlikely to improve educational provision. Indeed, only in the United Kingdom (England) does the publication of school test results coexist with parental freedom to choose between schools – two factors which in combination are most likely to reinforce the influence of tests on school practice. In the rest of Europe, the most common model is to use test results as the basis for improving schools, although the former are neither published nor considered in external school evaluation.

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To sum up, the comparative analysis and review of current policy debates on national testing demonstrate that European countries are making different choices as regards the importance they attach to such testing in measuring pupil, school and system performance. Their policy decisions in this respect are directly reflected in differences between parameters such as frequency, subject coverage, the participation of a whole cohort or just a sample, and the uses made of test results. Views on national testing are still evolving, and the debate on its precise role continues as some countries complete full implementation of their systems for testing, while others reassess their experience to date, and yet others consider the possibility of introducing national tests. Overall, the report highlights key aspects of testing in which countries could learn from each other's experience. However, as the review of the literature makes clear ([1]), the impact of national tests on the performance of pupils and schools and on the overall quality of learning, as well as the cost-effectiveness of tests, remain areas in which further data and research are still needed.

([1]) Nathalie Mons, Theoretical and real effects of standardised assessment, August 2009.

GLOSSARY

Country codes

EU-27	European Union
BE	Belgium
BE fr	Belgium – French Community
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czech Republic
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FR	France
IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta

NL	Netherlands
AT	Austria
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland
SE	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom
UK-ENG	England
UK-WLS	Wales
UK-NIR	Northern Ireland
UK-SCT	Scotland
EFTA/EEA countries	The three countries of the European Free Trade Association which are members of the European Economic Area
IS	Iceland
LI	Liechtenstein
NO	Norway

Statistical code

: Data not available

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is an instrument suitable for compiling statistics on education internationally. It covers two cross-classification variables: levels and fields of education with the complementary dimensions of general/vocational/pre-vocational orientation and educational/labour market destination. The current version, ISCED 97 ([1]) distinguishes seven levels of education (from ISCED 0 to ISCED 6). Empirically, ISCED assumes that several criteria exist which can help allocate education programmes to levels of education. Depending on the level and type of education concerned, there is a need to establish a hierarchical ranking system between main and subsidiary criteria (typical entrance qualification, minimum entrance requirement, minimum age, staff qualification, etc.). The following levels are distinguished:

- ISCED 0: Pre-primary education
- ISCED 1: Primary education
- ISCED 2: Lower secondary education
- ISCED 3: Upper secondary education
- ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education
- ISCED 5: Tertiary education (first stage)
- ISCED 6: Tertiary education (second stage)

This study takes into account ISCED levels 1 and 2 only. Full details are given in the following paragraphs:

ISCED 1: Primary education

This level begins generally between 5 and 7 years of age, is compulsory in all countries and generally lasts from four to six years.

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education

It continues the basic programmes of the primary level, although teaching is typically more subject-focused. Usually, the end of this level coincides with the end of compulsory education.

([1]) http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/isced/ISCED_A.pdf

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TABLE OF FIGURES

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Chapter 2: Aims and Organisation of National Testing

Chapter 3: Uses and Impact of National Test Results

National tables with information on selected parameters of national tests. ISCED levels 1 and 2, 2008/09

Belgium (French Community)

BE fr	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Évaluation externe des acquis des élèves de l'enseignement obligatoire (External assessment of pupil achievements in compulsory education) ([1])	*Épreuve externe commune*
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1 and 2	1
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to provide teachers with information on the level of achievement of their pupils compared with expected targets and with the overall results of pupils within the French Community, as well as with the results by geographic area – to inform the education authorities and all players about student attainment within the educational system Uses: – for publication of 'results and comments' which contains the average results achieved across the French Community (but individual school results) – schools conduct a reflection process to define and implement strategies aimed at improving results – the inspection and pedagogic activities departments take these results into account when assessing the level of studies and pedagogic activities – the Committee for education system monitoring submits a notice to the government which, if necessary, includes recommendations for improving the results	Use: – for certification of pupils on completing primary education (but in the event of failure the school may award a certificate to a pupil on the basis of the pupil's previous results and a supporting report by the year 6 primary school teacher)
Target group	All year 2 (7 years old) and year 5 (10 years old) primary school pupils and pupils in year 2 of secondary school (13 years old)	All year 6 primary school pupils plus pupils in the first streamed year of secondary school
Subjects tested	Three-year cycle: 2008/09: sciences, history and geography (postponed to 2009/10); 2009/10: reading, writing competences and foreign languages (in primary school year 6); 2010/11: mathematics and foreign languages (second year of secondary school)	French, mathematics, scientific initiation/awareness and training/awareness of history and geography

([1]) These tests have been postponed for school year 2009/10.

Belgium (German-speaking Community)

BE de	No national tests at ISCED 1 and 2 in 2008/09

Belgium (Flemish Community)

BEnl	National Test 1:
	Periodieke Peilingen (Periodical national assessment)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to monitor the education system – to inform participating schools – to provide learning opportunities for all schools Uses: – written consultation on the results with all educational partners, which forms the starting point of an annual conference resulting in the publication of recommendations to all educational parties in order to improve the Flemish educational quality – policy measures such as curriculum review – feedback to schools participating in the survey, which can be used in their self-evaluation – for schools that are not participating in the survey parallel versions of the national test and similar feedback reports are available so that they too can use it in their self-evaluation
Target group	All pupils in year 6 (age 12) in the sample of schools participating, and a sample of classes in year 8 (age 14), among the selected schools
Subjects tested	The government decides on the subject(s) to be tested each year In 2008/09 both years 6 and 8 are tested in mathematics. In 2009/10 'Environmental studies: time, space, society and use of information sources' will be tested at the end of ISCED 1 (year 6)

Bulgaria

BG	National Test 1:
	Vunshno ocenavane (External Assessment): – end of year 4 (end of primary education), years 5 and 6 – end of year 7 (end of basic education, for certification), only from 2009/10
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to register performance in view of the state educational requirements and syllabi – to draw national programmes and make necessary policy changes Uses: – test results are part of the second-term continuous assessment in each respective school year – conclusions are drawn on the trends in and state of education (tracing performance of pupils during several consecutive years and annually comparing the performance in the same school years); these conclusions help policy makers at all levels to plan corresponding measures if necessary – comparing performance against the state education requirements
Target group	All pupils in years 4, 5 and 6
Subjects tested	– year 4: Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics, man and nature, and man and society – year 5 and 6: Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics, man and nature, history, geography and foreign language

Czech Republic

CZ	No national tests at ISCED 1 and 2 in 2008/09

Denmark

DK	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	De nationale test (National Test – full implementation in 2010)	*Folkeskolens afgangsprøve* (Leaving Examination of the *Folkeskole* ([2]))
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1 and 2	2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to monitor achievement and to provide the teachers with information to be used when planning teaching activities, i.e. to target the needs of individual students – to give thorough feedback to schools, pupils and parents	Objective: – to document the degree to which the pupil satisfies the requirements stipulated in the course regulation Uses: – for certification – no significance of the test for entry into ISCED level 3
Target group	From years 2 to 8; compulsory for the pupils in the *Folkeskole*	Compulsory for every pupil at end of year 9 in the *Folkeskole*
Subjects tested	12 tests in 7 subjects; 10 tests are compulsory: Danish/reading in years 2, 4, 6 and 8, mathematics in years 3 and 6, English in year 7, biology, physics/chemistry and geography in year 8 In addition: two voluntary tests in Danish as a second language in years 5 and 7	Compulsory subjects: Danish (written and oral), mathematics (written), English (oral), physics/chemistry (oral), and one test in a subject in humanities and one in sciences In addition, the pupil can be tested in optional subjects (i.e. German, French, needlecraft, woodwork or home economics (the latter three tests can be taken at the end of year 8 at the discretion of the school head)

([2]) At the end of the optional year 10 there is a voluntary Leaving Examination *(10.-klasses-prøver)*, which is similar to National test but places higher academic demands. Subjects tested: one or more subjects among: Danish, mathematics, English, German/French and science. Additionally, pupils can choose to sit for one or more of the year 9 level examinations in Danish, mathematics, English or science, or choose a combination of year 9 and 10 level examinations.

Germany

DE	National Test 1:
	Hauptschulabschluss (*Hauptschule* leaving certificate – at end of year 9) / *Realschulabschluss* (*Realschule* leaving certificate – at end of year 10)
Main aim	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to assure quality and support the development of schools and teaching practice – to feed into internal and external evaluation Uses: – for proving that the pupil has reached the aims of main stream schooling – for certification purposes – for assisting with grading and/or progression to the next stage of education – for the local school authority and the Ministry of Education of the *Land*, the results are delivered in aggregated form with indicators, comparing trends over time
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils at the end of year 9 if they want to leave school at the end of this school year If they want to attend school up to year 10, the test is compulsory at the end of year 10
Subjects tested	The compulsory subjects tested are German, mathematics and the first foreign language (mostly English, in fewer cases French) In Baden-Württemberg, pupils have to pass an additional theme-oriented project test

Estonia

EE	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Tasemetöö (Standardised test)	*Põhikooli lõpueksam* (Final examination of basic school / compulsory education)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	Single structure (ISCED level 1)	Single structure (ISCED level 2)
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to assess learning outcomes at the end of particular stages – to compare results among schools – to support decision making in curriculum development, in designing teaching materials and in in-service teacher training Uses: – no guidelines for use, but results are taken into consideration for internal evaluation, in combination with results from formative assessment used for end-of-year grading – results of test at the end of year 9 are analysed nationally based on a sample (10-15 %) of cohort for the compulsory subjects and on the whole cohort for the optional subject	
Target group	End of year 3 (age 10) and end of year 6 (age 13), sample of pupils	End of year 9 (age 16); compulsory for all students
Subjects tested	Year 3: Estonian/Russian as mother tongue and mathematics Year 6: Estonian/Russian as mother tongue, mathematics and a subject that is different from year to year	Three tests have to be taken: 2 in compulsory subjects: – Estonian language and literature in the Estonian medium schools and Estonian as a second language in the Russian medium schools – mathematics 1 in an optional subject: to choose among the Russian language and literature in the Russian medium schools; English, French, German or Russian as a foreign language, biology, geography, chemistry, physics, history and social studies

Ireland

IE	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
	Standardised testing in English reading and mathematics	National Assessment of English Reading (NAER) National Assessment of Mathematical Achievement (NAMA)	Junior Certificate
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1	1	2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to help teachers make more informed decisions about teaching and learning – to inform parents of pupils' progress – to assist in the identification of pupils that may require support	Objectives: – to establish current reading standards/standards in mathematics – to compare outcomes with the outcomes of the previous NAER/NAMA – to provide data to assist in policy review, formulation and resource allocation (NAER) – to examine how teaching and assessment has evolved since the introduction of the primary school curriculum (NAMA) – to examine school, teacher, home background and pupil factors which may be related to reading standards/standards in mathematics (NAER/NAMA) – to provide a basis with which to compare future assessments (NAER) – to make recommendations with regard to teaching and assessment (NAMA)	Objectives: – to assess students' progress across a wide spectrum of curricular subjects – to act as a benchmark as students' first assessment 'event' in a national sense in their post-primary education – to determine what students opt to do in the next phase of their post-primary education – to give a broad and appropriate record of the students' progress and achievement to that stage

IE	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
		Uses: – for informing policy – for monitoring standards – for identifying correlates of achievement – for introducing realistic standards – for promoting accountability – for increasing public awareness – for directing teachers' efforts	Uses: – for certification purposes – at post-primary level, the national test results are a source of data for policy advisers and policy makers in the Department of Education and Science, researchers – results are also used by schools and students as the basis for selection of subjects for study for senior cycle
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils at the end of 1st class OR the beginning of 2nd class (6-7 year olds) AND at the end of 4th class OR the beginning of 5th class (10-11 year olds)	Second class (i.e. 4th year of primary school) and 6th class (8th and final year of primary school) pupils Sample of pupils	At the end of year 3 post-primary education Compulsory for all pupils
Subjects tested	English reading, mathematics	NAER: English reading NAMA: mathematics	Compulsory core subjects: Irish; English; mathematics; civic, social and political education (CSPE); Other subjects: Ancient Greek; art, craft and design; business studies; classical studies; environmental and social studies (ESS); French; geography; German; Hebrew studies; history; home economics; Italian; Latin; materials technology wood; metalwork; music; religious education; science; Spanish; technical graphics; technology

Greece

EL	No national tests at ISCED 1 and 2 in 2008/09

Spain

ES	National Test 1 ([3]):
	Evaluaciones Generales de Diagnóstico (General Diagnostic Evaluations, implemented at State level)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to produce representative data on both students and schools at the Autonomous Communities level and at the State level Use: – must lead to revision and improvement commitments according to the results obtained
Target group	Samples of pupils in year 4 of primary education (starting in 2008/09) and year 2 of lower secondary education (starting in 2009/10), at the end of the school years
Subjects tested	The aim is to evaluate eight key competences on a cyclical basis. In 2008/09 the linguistic communication competence, the mathematical competence, the knowledge and interaction with the physical world competence and the social and civic competence are assessed in year 4 of primary education. In 2009/10 the same competences will be assessed in year 2 of secondary education. The calendar for the following years until closing the cycle will be decided by the Governing Council of the Institute of Evaluation.

([3]) In addition, all Autonomous Communities will administer tests in the same school years, year 4 of primary education (starting in 2008/09) and year 2 of lower secondary education(starting in 2009/10), to all pupils with the aim to collect data about each pupil and school. This information will be used to help schools to improve the quality of education they provide and to inform parents and the education community. It will be up to each Autonomous Community to decide the annual schedule for testing of the eight key competences. Most Communities will evaluate the linguistic communication competence and the mathematical competence every year. In certain cases all the key competences will be tested in the same year.

France ([4])

FR	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
	Cycle des évaluations bilans en fin d'école et en fin de collège (Cycle of monitoring assessment at the end of primary and lower secondary school)	*Évaluations-bilans des compétences de base en français et en mathématiques en fin d'école et en fin de collège* (Assessment of basic competences in French and Mathematics at the end of primary and lower secondary education)	*Évaluations-diagnostiques* (System of diagnostic assessments)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Identifying individual learning needs
ISCED level	1 and 2	1 and 2	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to monitoring the education system at the national level – to compile an objective report on the competences and knowledge of pupils in core subjects Use: – for regulating educational policy at national level and, more specifically, for acting on curricular contents, the definition of *socles de compétences* (competence tresholds), the organisation of academic courses, the pedagogical organisations, and certain school populations	Objectives: – to monitoring the education system at the national level – to compile an objective report on the basic competences in French and mathematics Use: – for regulating educational policy at national level and, more specifically, for acting on curricular contents, the definition of *socles de compétences* (competence tresholds), the organisation of academic courses, the pedagogical organisations, and certain school populations	Objective: – to know the levels of attainment of a pupil or class (strengths and weaknesses) Use: – teachers take necessary actions to help pupils in their learning process, taking into account the heterogeneity of classes and the diversity of pupils' pace of learning

([4]) A written examination with content standardised at national level is organised in several subjects for the award of the national certificate (the *brevet*) at the end of lower secondary education. Despite the existence of central procedures for administering and marking this examination, it cannot be regarded as a form of nationally standardised testing, given the wide variety of practices adopted in marking and interpreting its results.

FR	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
Target group	Representative sample of schools (public and private), classes and pupils completing primary school (10 to 11 years old) and at the end of compulsory education (14 to 15 years old)	In the middle of the school year, representative sample of schools (public and private), classes and pupils completing primary school (10 to 11 years old) and at the end of compulsory education (14 to 15 years old)	Optional for CE2 (primary school) pupils; compulsory for pupils starting the first year of lower secondary school
Subjects tested	Rotation of all subjects taught at ISCED levels 1 and 2 (with the exception of arts and sport) on a 5-year cycle: in year 1 pupils are tested in French, in year 2 in foreign languages (English, German, Spanish), in year 3 in civic behaviour and life in society, in year 4 in life and earth sciences, physics, chemistry and in year 5 in mathematics	French and mathematics	French and mathematics

Italy

IT	National Test 1
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system (for primary schools' second and fifth year and secondary schools' first year) Taking decisions about the school career of pupils (for lower secondary schools' third year pupils)
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to survey pupils' learning entering and exiting various education levels, in order to measure any value added by schools in terms of improvement of the pupils' learning levels Uses: – as part of the state examination of lower secondary school's third year pupils, for certification purposes – the use of national testing results has not been defined yet by laws and regulations. At present, the Ministry of Education suggests the following use of national test results: – for monitoring of learning level entering and exiting school, also in terms of value added of each school – for evaluation of school managers – for evaluation of teachers

IT	National Test 1
	– INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of Educational Systems who prepares national tests) uses it to promote the use of national testing results in order to improve strategies to raise pupils' learning levels – local authorities, at regional and provincial levels, employ then aggregated results of national testing to promote training and updating activities for school managers and teachers – beginning with the State Examination of the 2008/09 school year, national testing will have to supply information regarding foreign pupils' performances within the final examination, notably in relation to the knowledge of language skills
Target group	Pupils in years 2 and 5 of primary school and years 1 and 3 in lower secondary schools (average age 8,11,12 and 14, respectively) Testing is compulsory for year 3 of lower secondary education; tests in years 2 and 5 of primary school and year 1 of lower secondary school are sample based
Subjects tested	Italian and mathematics; Sciences and English will be added from year 2010/11

Cyprus

CY	National test 1:
	Dokimia gia diagnosi provlimaton alfavitismou (Test for the diagnosis of problems of literacy)
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs
ISCED level	1
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to identify pupils who are at risk to develop functional illiteracy Use: – for providing extra support, according to specially designed programmes, to pupils that have been identified as being at risk to develop functional illiteracy
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 6 (an extension of the test to years 2 and 9 is currently in a pilot phase)
Subjects tested	Modern Greek and mathematics

Latvia

LV	National Test 1:
	Valsts pārbaudes darbs (National testing), which includes *Ieskaite* (test) and *eksāmens* (exam)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system (for tests at the end of year 3 and 6) Taking decisions about the school career of pupils (for exam the end of year 9)
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to evaluate the quality of education – to measure the level of obtained knowledge and skills of each pupil in specific subjects Uses: – the results of national testing are used for pupil grading and certification – schools can use this data to evaluate their quality of education – the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations, which is responsible for the development and improvement of the national examination system, uses the results for determining the dynamic of pupil achievements by comparing the results of national tests and the end of term or school year mark
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 3 (age 10), 6 (age 13) and 9 (age 16)
Subjects tested	For national tests at the age of 10 (end of year 3): – a combined content test – a test in Latvian for minority education programmes For national tests at the age of 13 (end of year 6): – test in Latvian for schools with Latvian as the language of instruction – test in Latvian for schools implementing minority programmes – test in mathematics – test in minority language for schools implementing minority education programmes

LV	National Test 1:
Subjects tested (continued)	For national tests at the age of 16 (end of year 9): – exam in Latvian for schools with Latvian as the language of instruction – centralised exam in Latvian for schools implementing minority programmes – exam in mathematics – exam in history and the history of Latvia – exam in minority language for schools implementing minority education programmes – test in a foreign language – test in natural sciences – test in sports

Lithuania

LT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Nacionaliniai mokinių pasiekimų tyrimai (National studies of students' achievements)	*Pagrindinio ugdymo pasiekimų patikrinimas* (PUPP) (Basic education achievement tests)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2	2 (end of basic education)
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to monitor the education system – to identify/analyse teaching and learning problems – to assess the quality of education on the local/municipal level Uses: – at the national level, the results of the tests are regularly used in education monitoring, and in the development and implementation of the curriculum – schools use the results in self-assessment and as achievement feedback and guidance to students and their parents	Objective: – to measure pupils' basic education achievement and provide information on the quality of basic education Uses: – at the national level, the results of the tests are regularly used in education monitoring, and in the development and implementation of the curriculum – schools use the results in self-assessment and as achievement feedback and guidance to students and their parents
Target group	Sample testing in odd years, year 4 (10-11 year olds) and year 8 (14-15 year olds); in even years, year 6 (12-13 year olds) and year 10/2 *gymnasium* (16-17 year olds)	Optional test in the final year of basic education (end of year 10/2 *gymnasium*, 16-17 years)

LT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
Subjects tested	In year 4: Lithuanian language (as a mother tongue) and mathematics In year 6, 8 10/2 *gymnasium*: Lithuanian language (as a mother tongue), mathematics; sciences (biology, chemistry, physics) and social studies (history, geography, civics)	Most tests cover two subjects: mother tongue (Lithuanian, Byelorussian, Polish, Russian or German) and mathematics. In the schools with non-Lithuanian language of instruction, pupils can also take a test in Lithuanian as a state language.

Luxembourg

LU	National Test 1:	National Test 1:
	Épreuves standardisées (Standardised tests)	*Épreuves standardisées dans le cadre de la procédure d'orientation* (Standardised tests within the streaming procedure)
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1 and 2	1
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to situate the results of classes in relation to the national average and groups of similar classes whose population is identical to theirs Uses: – the aggregated results by class and by institution are sent to the schools – for remedial measures taken by the teachers	Objective: – to guide the streaming of pupils Use: – the pupil's results for standardised tests represent one criterion out of five included in the streaming notice issued by the guidance council with a view to admitting pupils into secondary education
Target group	Compulsory for all year 3 primary school pupils (9 years old) and pupils in year 5 of secondary education (15 years old), at the start of the academic year	Compulsory for all year 6 primary school pupils (11 years old)
Subjects tested	German, mathematics French, for pupils in year 5 of secondary education	German, French and mathematics

Hungary

HU	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Országos Kompetenciamérés (National Assessment of Basic Competences-NABC – for year 4)	*Országos Kompetenciamérés* (National Assessment of Basic Competences-NABC – for years 6 and 8)
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	Level 1	Level 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to diagnose the individual child's level of development in different domains – to provide teachers with information about the current level and quality of basic skills at individual level, to be used as a basis for further planning and goal setting – to promote the development of the culture of evaluation and self-evaluation at institutional level Uses: – schools and teachers are the main users of results, for curriculum and teaching development purposes – school heads incorporate the results in their self-evaluation reports – for policy decision making – for research and secondary analyses	Objectives: – to identify learners' performance – to provide schools with examples of new competency-based teaching content as well as methods of evaluation, – to provide maintainers of schools with data that is reliably comparable with national performance data – to inform local, regional and national policymakers and the school's clients (parents, students) about school effectiveness – to promote the development of the culture of evaluation and self-evaluation at institutional level Uses: – schools are primary users, also maintainers of institutions, decision makers, educational authorities – for providing data and practices to carry out objective local, institute-level self-evaluation
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 4	Compulsory for all pupils in years 6 and 8
Subjects tested	No subjects are tested, but the current level and quality of basic skills (writing, reading, counting, cognitive processes)	No subjects are tested but rather whether students are able to use their knowledge and skills (in reading and mathematics literacy) in real life situations

Malta

MT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:	National Test 4:
	Annual Examinations for Primary Schools	Junior Lyceum Entrance Examination into Form 1 (to be phased out in school year 2010/11)	Annual Examinations for Secondary Schools	Secondary Education Certificate Examination (SECE)
Main aim	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1 (State primary schools)	1 (State schools and church/ independent schools)	1 and 2 (State secondary schools)	2 (State and non-state schools)
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to use results for progression purposes – to inform parents of the pupil's summative achievement for a school year – to stream children in years 5 and 6 according to the examination results – to inform the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) about the performance of individual schools (for monitoring and audit purposes)	Objective: – to select pupils at the end of primary schooling for proceeding either to a Junior Lyceum or to a general secondary school	Objectives: – to use results for progression purposes – to inform parents of the pupil's achievement for a school year – to place pupils in the core subjects according to the examination results – to inform the DQSE about the performance of individual schools (for monitoring and audit purposes)	Objective: – to provide certification at the end of secondary education

MT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:	National Test 4:
	Use: – for progression and streaming purposes in years 5 and 6	Use: – for informing the DQSE and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) for monitoring and placement purposes, respectively	Uses: – for students in Forms 1 to 5 for progression and setting purposes – for parents to be informed about the student's progress – for DQSE to monitor and audit schools' performance – the Form 5 Annual Examination is the basis for the School Leaving Certificate	Use: – for admission purposes to post secondary institutions
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in years 4, 5 and 6 (age 8+, 9+ and 10+, respectively) in State primary schools only	Pupils completing year 6 (age 10+) in State schools as well as in non-continuous church/independent schools Optional, however taken by approximately 90 % of pupils in State schools and approximately 35 % of pupils in Non-state schools	Compulsory for all pupils in State secondary schools in Forms 1 to 5 (age 11 to 15+)	Optional, however taken by about 80 % of all pupils completing secondary education in State and Non-state schools (aged 15+ to 16+)
Subjects tested	Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies	Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies	Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies, science and a range of compulsory and optional subjects in the arts, sciences, languages and humanities	A wide range of subjects including: accounting, Arabic, art, biology, business studies, chemistry, classical culture, commerce, computer studies, economics, English language, English literature, environmental studies *(studji ambjentali)*, French, geography, German, Greek, history, home economics, Italian, Latin, *IL-Malti*, mathematics, physics, religious knowledge, *IT-Taghlim Religjuz*, Russian, social studies, Spanish, graphical communication, textiles and design, European studies, physical education, design and technology (for a complete list go to: http://home.um.edu.mt/matsec/)

The Netherlands

NL	National Test 1:
	CITO-*Eindtoets Basisonderwijs* (Final test primary education)
Main aim	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to inform parents/guardians and teachers about what would be the best possible secondary education for the child that participated in the test Uses: – the pupil's report containing the CITO test results is a tool in the consultations between parents and school about the choice of type of school – the head of the primary school informs the receiving school for secondary education about the results and level of the pupil wishing to enter that secondary school – another CITO report compares the schools' average scores with the national averages, in view of monitoring the school's quality of education and carry out further analysis, leading to changes in the school's curriculum
Target group	Participation in the test is a school's/competent authority's decision, in public and private education, but in practice nearly all pupils in the last year of primary education (around age 12) do take the test
Subjects tested	Language of instruction, arithmetic/mathematics, study skills and world orientation; world orientation is an optional part of the test, so schools decide if they participate in this item

Austria

AT	National Test 1:
	Standardtestung/Testung zur Überprüfung der Bildungsstandards (Educational Standards tests – first regular and country-wide testing will start in 2011/12 and 2012/13)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to provide feedback on framework conditions and outcomes (strengths/weaknesses, need for development) for schools – to check to what extent schools and teachers comply with their responsibility of teaching core competences – to evaluate the performance of schools – to increase accountability by setting benchmarks in a partly autonomous school system Uses: – for providing individual feedback for the students and an assessment for learning – for teachers, class results provide a means of self-evaluation – the aim is to install a feedback system on the basis of external evaluations following the concept of evidence-based policy
Target group	Sample test for pupils in year 4 (end of primary education, age 10) and year 8 (end of lower secondary education, age 14)
Subjects tested	For year 4: German reading and writing and mathematics For year 8: German, mathematics and English

Poland

PL	National Test 1:
	Sprawdzian dla uczniów kończących szkołę podstawową (Test for pupils completing primary school) *Egzamin gimnazjalny dla uczniów kończących gimnazjum* (Lower-secondary school exam for pupils completing lower secondary school)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system (ISCED levels 1 and 2) Taking decisions about the school career of pupils (ISCED level 2)
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to identify achievements – to assess the quality of the school's educational impact – to ensure the comparability of certificates and diplomas across the country regardless of where they are awarded Uses: – no formal selection purpose although results are sometimes informally used for such purpose (mostly at competitive schools) (ISCED level 1) – drafting of national reports analysing test results
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 6 of primary education (age 12 on average) and year 3 of lower secondary education (age 15 on average)
Subjects tested	Test at end of primary education (year 6 of primary): cross-curricular approach in testing five skills (reading, writing, reasoning, using information, using knowledge in practice) Test at end of lower secondary education (year 3 of lower secondary): part 1-humanities, part 2-science (mathematics and natural sciences), and part 3-a modern foreign language (for the first time in 2009); parts 1 and 2 are cross-curricular exams

Portugal

PT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Provas de Aferição (Standardised/Gauged Tests)	*Exames Nacionais do 3.º ciclo do Ensino Básico* (3rd Cycle Compulsory Education National Exams)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1	2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to measure and monitor acquisition of the key competences as described in the National Curriculum – to improve the quality of learning/the education system Use: – for teachers and school boards the results help to identify learning needs and to adjust teaching strategies	Objective: – to assess not only students but also the education system as a whole; the test relates also to the external assessment of schools Use: – for certification and for grading (together with continuous assessment (the test result represent 30 % of the final overall grade)
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 4 (average age 9 years) and year 6 (average 11 years)	Compulsory for all pupils at the end of year 9 (average 14 years)
Subjects tested	Mathematics and Portuguese	Mathematics and Portuguese

Romania

RO	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	Evaluarea Națională la finalul clasei a IV (National Assessment Grade IV)	*Tezele cu subiect unic la clasele a VII-a şi a VIII-a*. (End of semester tests in grades VII and VIII)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1	2
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to measure and monitor the implementation of the national curriculum standards at the end of primary education Use: – a technical report on national level results is produced by the National Centre for Curriculum and Assessment in Pre-university Education (NCCAPE) and is used by policy makers and curriculum experts in order to make curriculum changes, and by schools to compare their results with the national average	Objective: – to allow comparisons of students' outcomes and to support certification and selection decisions Uses: – the test results are directly reported to students / teachers / schools – the results are also aggregated at county level and at national level – the average of student performances measured by these tests counts for the enrolment of each student either in an academic type of educational institution or in a vocational type of institution
Target group	Sample test for pupils in year 4 of primary education (end of primary education), age 10	Compulsory for all pupils in years 7 and 8
Subjects tested	Mother tongue (Romanian language or Hungarian language); mathematics; natural sciences	Mother tongue, mathematics, history or geography

Slovenia

SI	National Test 1:
	Nacionalno preverjanje znanja (National Assessment)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	Single structure (ISCED levels 1 and 2)
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to gain additional information on pupils' knowledge, the meeting of curriculum standards and the functioning of the education system Uses: – pupils and their parents receive additional information on attainment which is comparable with peers and the national average – teachers receive information on attainment of curriculum standards by individual pupils – school use results (together with other indicators) to evaluate the quality of their work – at system level results can be used for the development of the system as a whole, the curriculum, teacher training and teaching materials
Target group	Optional for pupils at the end of the second cycle (year 6; age 11 or 12) Compulsory for all pupils at the end of the third cycle (year 9; age 14 or 15)
Subjects tested	At the end of the second cycle: Slovenian (or Hungarian/Italian in ethnically mixed areas), mathematics, and a foreign language (English or German) At the end of third cycle: Slovenian (or Hungarian/Italian in ethnically mixed areas), mathematics, and a third subject (determined annually by the Minister among foreign language: English or German; biology; chemistry; physics; Engineering and technology; geography; history; Civics and homeland education and ethics; music and arts; sports)

Slovakia

SK	National Test 1:
	Celoslovenské certifikačné testovanie žiakov deviatych ročníkov ZŠ (National certificated testing of pupils of year 9 of primary school)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to compare schools in view of improving their work – in the future, to become a criterion for admission to upper secondary schools Uses: – for pupils' comparison with the whole pupil population tested – for teachers' formative evaluation of their pupils and evaluation of their teaching – for pupils and parents to use for making a choice of upper secondary school
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 9
Subjects tested	Mathematics, language of instruction: Slovak (State language), Hungarian, Ukrainian In 2008/09 pupils from schools with minority language instruction will also be tested in State language

Finland

FI	National Test 1:
	Oppimistulosten kansallinen arviointi (FI) / *Nationell utvärdering av inlärningsresultat* (SE) (National evaluation of learning outcomes)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to follow-up at national level how well the objectives set in the national core curricula have been reached – to monitor the implementation of equality and equity in education (aspects taken into account are gender, regional, social and language equality) Uses: – for schools: for their own development purposes – the national results are used for national development and as a basis for political decisions – for meta-analyses, e.g. on the learning outcomes and their relation to different perspectives of promoting equality and equity, such as support measures, social background, pupil assessment
Target group	Generally the sample tests take place in one or two school years, most often in year 6 (end of 'primary phase' of basic education), year 9 (final year of basic education), or in other curricular transition points (the points in the national curriculum for which assessment guidelines have been provided); in the school year 2008/09 the sample tests took place in years 6 and 9
Subjects tested	Most often one subject only, either Mother tongue, or Mathematics, or less often a third subject or cluster of subjects according to national priorities; in the school year 2008/09 pupils in year 6 are tested in Mathematics and pupils in year 9 in Swedish as a second foreign language and in Mother tongue

Sweden

SE	National Test 1:
	Nationella prov (National Tests)
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs (years 3 and 5) Taking decisions about the school career of pupils (year 9)
ISCED level	Single structure (ISCED levels 1 and 2)
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – years 3 and 5: to identify areas where pupils need individual support or are performing well – year 9: to support grading and to demonstrate whether the pupil has attained the national goals in the tested subjects – all years: local and national monitoring Use: – for enabling school authorities to assess the quality of their own services
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in year 3, 5 and 9
Subjects tested	Year 3: Swedish, Swedish as a second language, mathematics Year 5: Swedish, Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics Year 9: Swedish, Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics; in addition, one third of the schools hold tests in biology, one third in chemistry and one third in physics

United Kingdom (England)

UK-ENG	National Test 1:	National Test 2:
	National Curriculum Assessment ([5])	Optional national curriculum tests
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs (Key Stage 1) ([6]) Monitoring schools and/or the education system (Key Stage 2)	Identifying individual learning needs
ISCED level	1	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to assess achievement – to inform parents, employers and other interested parties – to monitor the education system Uses: – for informing parental choice – for supporting the teacher assessment process – for school accountability	Objectives: – to evaluate progress and to diagnose strengths and weaknesses across a class and for individual pupils – to inform on whether pupils are on target to do well in the statutory tests at end of Key Stage 2 Use: – schools use tests for reporting to parents; however, the tests are not statutory, not reported upon and not centrally marked (teachers are the main users)
Target group	Final year of Key Stage 1 (year 2, age 7) Final year of Key Stage 2 (year 6, age 11) Compulsory for all pupils in publicly funded schools; independent schools are encouraged but not required to take part in these tests	Optional tests in years 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 (ages 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13) which are used by the majority of schools
Subjects tested	Key Stage 1: English and mathematics Key Stage 2: English, mathematics and science	English and mathematics

([5]) Compulsory tests at the end of Key Stage 3 (age 14) have been abolished as a statutory requirement with effect from school year 2008/09. They will be progressively replaced with increased and improved classroom assessment and more frequent reporting to parents. Test materials for 2008/09 are available to schools who want them.

([6]) Tests at the end of Key Stage 1 are an element of teacher assessment and do not stand alone.

United Kingdom (Wales)

UK-WLS	No national tests at ISCED 1 and 2 in 2008/09

United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)

UK-NIR	National Test 1:
	Transfer Tests ([7])
Main aim	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	1
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to determine selection for post-primary education
Target group	Pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 (year 6); tests are optional and are taken by around 35 per cent of the pupils
Subjects tested	English, mathematics and science & technology

([7]) The last centrally provided transfer tests to determine selection for post-primary education were taken in 2008 for 2009 entry. For 2010 entry schools are recommended not to use academic criteria but are not precluded from doing so.

United Kingdom (Scotland)

UK-SCT	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
	National 5-14 Assessment Bank	Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA)	National Qualifications (NQ): Standard Grade or Intermediate (1 and 2) Examinations
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils
ISCED level	Level 1 and first half of level 2	Level 1 and first half of level 2	Second half of level 2
Objectives and uses	Objective: – to confirm teachers' judgements against national standards, as part of a coherent system of assessment activities, the main aim of which is to support pupils' learning Use: – information to parents, schools, local authorities	Objective: – to provide a national overview of attainment levels Uses: – national monitoring, information to the Scottish Government – drafting of a national report	Objective: – certification of attainment at Secondary 3 and 4 (age 14-16) Use: – schools use results for self-evaluation and improvement planning
Target group	Pupils aged 5-14; optional, but all or almost all schools in the public sector use the tests; very few independent schools do	Compulsory for all pupils in primary school years 3, 5, 7 and secondary school year 2 (ages 8, 10, 12, 14) in all mainstream schools (including independent schools)	Optional, but almost all students in public schools in secondary school years 4 or 3 take it
Subjects tested	Mother tongue (English or Gaelic) and mathematics	Mother tongue (English or Gaelic), mathematics, science, social subjects (each year focus on one of these areas)	All subjects are covered; students choose 7 or 8 subjects, including English and mathematics

Iceland

IS	National Test 1:
	Samræmd könnunarpróf (Nationally co-ordinated examinations)
Main aim	Identifying individual learning needs / Monitoring schools and/or the education system
ISCED level	1 and 2
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to provide information on pupils' status to themselves, parents and schools – to monitor the education system – to compare schools' results Uses: – for supporting teacher decisions regarding further learning/teaching – recommendation for schools' self-evaluation to take the results into account
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils. in years 4 and 7, in public and grant-aided schools ([8])
Subjects tested	Icelandic, English and mathematics

Liechtenstein

LI	No national tests at ISCED 1 and 2 in 2008/09

([8]) The nationally coordinated examinations in grade 10 will resume from school year 2009/10.

Norway

NO	National Test 1:	National Test 2:	National Test 3:
	Nasjonale prøver (National tests)	*Eksamen (*Examinations)	*Obligatorisk kartleggingsprøve* (Diagnostic test)
Main aim	Monitoring schools and/or the education system	Taking decisions about the school career of pupils	Identifying individual learning needs
ISCED level	1 and 2	2	1
Objectives and uses	Objectives: – to provide information on the pupils' basic skills – to provide a basis for improvement and development in the school Use: – intended as instruments for improvement and development activities locally and centrally	Objective: – to assess pupils at the end of lower secondary school Use: – for certification at the end of lower secondary school	Objective: – to identify the weakest readers, i.e. pupils that have developed or are in danger of developing reading and mathematical difficulties Use: – for supporting education in basic skills in early years
Target group	Compulsory for all pupils in years 5 and 8 (age 10 and 13)	Compulsory for all pupils at the end of lower secondary school, year 10	Compulsory for all pupils in year 2
Subjects tested	Tests are in basic skills: literacy (reading in Norwegian, mathematical literacy and reading in English)	Either mathematics, Norwegian or Sami, or English	Literacy (reading in Norwegian) and mathematical literacy

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