Evaluation of education in the European Union: policy and methodology

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Given the new European institutional environment for education and training, policy and methodology for evaluation have become closely interwoven and stakes have been raised. This emerging situation calls for a robust reappraisal of existing comparative evaluation data and systems in the light of the perceived needs of European countries and of the specificity of European policies. Educational evaluation in Europe is not meant to compare results in the usual sense of the word but rather to help set global policy objectives and provide data to see if those are reached within national contexts. Is it really possible to do this without developing a ‘unified’ European understanding and methodology of evaluation? To what extent can existing national and international data be used for the purpose, knowing that in some instances they measure aspects of education which are either not relevant for or are contrary to the educational objectives of the construction of the Union? What are the alternatives? What are the consequences for education and for assessment research in Europe?

Introduction

The conception of educational evaluation has changed over the years, moving from an essentially national to a more international perspective. It has also taken a new dimension with the fundamental role it now plays in Europe.

At first, many industrialised countries, in their different ways, developed a policy for monitoring and steering their education systems using evaluation. Considerations of all kinds—financial (improving the cost/effectiveness ratio), ideological (promoting a free market education) or economic (supporting the development of human capital)—played and are still playing a major part in this process. Based mostly on the structures of national education systems evaluation policies have evolved variously according to countries’ internal logic.

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In parallel with these national developments countries started to show interest in comparative evaluation at the international level. This was initially done through the work of mostly academic teams, which, for their own specific purposes, started bringing together research experience and skills in a comparative perspective, in particular within the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Later this work shifted from research to policy when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) started looking at comparative evaluation from the perspective of decision-making, in particular with its educational indicators project (INES).

More recently still the European Union became aware of the potential benefits of using indicators to steer and monitor education. The educational statistics produced by EUROSTAT (the statistical Office of the European Communities) and the qualitative analyses developed by EURYDICE (the information network on education in Europe) started to be more widely used for the purpose. But going ahead along this route necessitated radical institutional changes that have begun to happen.

Until a few years ago, owing to the fact that education was not included within the scope of the Treaty of Rome, evaluation was not official policy in the European institutions. The SOCRATES and LEONARDO programmes,¹ with various projects concerned with evaluation, were the main opportunity for the European Commission to start taking an active part in these matters. With the advent of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties it became possible for the Commission to start taking an active interest in education in general. Monitoring and evaluation were the last fields of activity to undergo significant development.

This is the historical context in which entirely new perspectives are emerging. Comparative international evaluation and monitoring have so far been conducted as incentives for countries to develop education systems which will allow them to perform better than others in order to attain or maintain a high level of economic growth. Few would say that education should not contribute to a sound economy—but with the latest moves within the European Union towards the definition of common educational goals and benchmarks it is no longer sufficient or indeed satisfactory. Comparative evaluation and monitoring methodologies need to become instruments of a common policy. This is why member states must foster new approaches specifically suited to the assessment of their own objectives.

In the course of discussing this issue I will look at the new situation that is developing in Europe, at the reasons why efforts should be made to develop independent assessment tools, and at the implications for the European Union and for researchers in this field.

The new political deal for education and training in Europe
Following changes in the European Union treaties, education and training, like employment and other areas, are now regarded as falling fully within the remit of the European institutions (European Council of Heads of State and Government,

The Lisbon European Council of March 2000 set the strategic goal for Europe of becoming by 2010 ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (Council of the European Union, 2000, p. 2). The Heads of State and Government also emphasized in their conclusions the central role of education and training in attaining such a goal. They decided that to foster the development of a European knowledge-based economy, cooperation in educational policy-making should be stepped up, following the model of the European guidelines for employment and their accompanying indicators policy. This led to the definition of an ‘open method of coordination in education’ to be applied to monitor the attainments of the education systems across Europe.

A year later, following a proposal by the Commission, the Ministers of Education adopted at the Stockholm European Council of February 2001 a Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems in Europe (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). Three overall strategic objectives were approved in Stockholm; they can be expected to influence the development of education and training systems in Europe over the course of the next decade and beyond:

1. improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU;
2. facilitating the access of all to education and training systems; and
3. opening-up education and training systems to the wider world.

Within these three strategic objectives, 13 concrete objectives and a series of key issues within each one of them were agreed.

In fact, this process had started just after the 2000 Lisbon Summit when inter-governmental seminars were held in Leiden (Netherlands) in 2000 and in Paris in 2001 to give an operational definition of the open method of coordination and when working groups were subsequently set up by the European Commission to work on three key issues (basic skills; information and communication technology (ICT); increasing numbers in mathematics, science and technology studies).

Subsequently, the Barcelona European Council of March 2002 endorsed the Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). This work programme set the priorities, the methodology and the timetable that will be implemented between now and 2010; it also called for an interim report to be presented in 2004, which was done at the spring European Council of March 2004.

These latest developments in the European Union must surely imply that subsidiarity in education is taking on a new meaning. Common European objectives and policies have been set and agreed by the member states and the Commission; the principle of using European indicators and benchmarks to monitor those policies is firmly established. In principle this could lead to more binding mechanisms being put
in place to ensure that countries comply with the European goals, as happens with the ‘pact of stability’ in the financial and economic spheres. Subsidiarity will therefore only remain to the extent that individual countries will be free to choose the ways in which objectives will be met nationally according to their administrative structures and their historical and cultural backgrounds. Europe is set to facilitate the convergence of its education systems. An obvious example in higher education is the ‘Bologna process’ with, for instance, the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).\(^4\)

To make things even more difficult to manage, this work is taking place in the context of the enlargement of the European Union. The meeting of education ministers held in Bratislava in June 2002 dealt with the ways in which the accession countries will participate in the ‘Barcelona process’.\(^5\) The ten countries which joined the Union in May 2004 have already been eased into this process.

**The need for independent educational indicators**

The work programme for the follow-up of the objectives for education and training is concerned with monitoring the implementation of 13 sub-objectives through 33 indicators and with the definition of benchmarks. At first the benchmarks will be freely set by each member State but the European Council will ultimately be able to set Europe-wide benchmarks through consensus, as is possible under articles 149 and 150 of the European Communities treaty. Indicators expressing the current state of achievement in the different areas will be presented in terms of European Union averages and of the average of the best three performing countries in Europe; Japanese and American comparative data will also be provided. In keeping with the provisions of the open method of coordination this system will be complemented by activities of peer review and exchange of best practice.

The potential impact on European education and training systems of using benchmarks is obvious. The process has already started with the adoption by the Education Council in Brussels on 5 and 6 May 2003 of five benchmarks that have now become part of the objectives for 2010:

- by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers should be achieved
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology in the European Union should increase by at least 15% by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease
- by 2010, at least 85% of 22-year-olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education
- by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000
- 2010, the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25–64 age group)
Of particular interest is the question of which indicators are going to be applied both for measuring the benchmarks and more generally for monitoring European education and training systems.

From a technical point of view it is widely accepted that educational indicators fall into the three categories of input, process and outcome (or output). Outcome indicators have become of particular interest since they are felt to be the only ones that truly reflect the real performance of education systems.

Nevertheless, a further distinction must be made between indicators resulting from the computation of routine administrative statistical data (class sizes, educational expenditure as a percentage of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), educational spending per pupil relative to per capita GDP, pupil/teacher ratio, percentage of an age group in higher education, etc.) that can be constructed from available statistics, and indicators derived from specific surveys. The latter are typically outcome indicators such as those obtained from the IEA’s Third International Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS), the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the IEA’s Progress in International Literacy Survey (PIRLS)).

A lot of statistical data are already available. They have been produced over the years on the basis of the unified process of national statistical data collection agreed jointly by EUROSTAT, the OECD and UNESCO and the data have been published in *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 1996, 1998, 2001) or in EURYDICE’s *Key Data on Education in Europe* (European Commission, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2002). They are not normally too contentious to construct internationally once a consensus has been obtained over the definition of the concepts they aim to underpin. However, the definition of the relevant concepts occasionally proves difficult to deal with because national structures or traditions may necessitate the simplifying of reality in the interest of comparability. For instance, education funding is an area where European and North American approaches remain apart.

So, while indicators in the first category (administrative data) are not too difficult to establish in a comparative perspective, those in the second category (outcome indicators) raise more fundamental questions. This is because measuring performance is more subjective and is influenced by cultural background, be it national or personal. Difficulties have already emerged, either because the data needed simply do not exist or because some countries question the way in which the data have been obtained.

From this point onwards I shall concentrate on indicators of achievement that seem to be particularly relevant for Europe and potentially may lead to developing new kinds of data.

The reports of the Commission’s expert groups which met in 2001 and 2002 to examine three key areas (basic skills; ICT; increasing numbers in mathematics, science and technology studies) provide a starting point for the follow-up work in these areas. But thanks to the reflection on the basic skills (definition of concepts and understanding of the indicators in particular) it has been possible to show very clearly the weakness, not to say the non-existence, of available and useable data in some
fundamental areas such as ‘learning to learn’ skills or foreign languages skills. The latter area is all the more fundamental from a policy perspective as the Barcelona European Council clearly stated in its conclusions that steps must be taken for the ‘establishment of a linguistic competence [in foreign languages] indicator in 2003’ (Council of the European Union, 2002, p. 19).

The European Commission has set up a working group to identify which indicators are most relevant for education in Europe. It is intended that they should also lead to the identification of remedial policies that might be implemented to bolster up skills which European comparisons may reveal to be weak. Such comparisons will take advantage of the diversity of European education systems by identifying the strong points of each of them that can be useful to others. What this means in practical terms is that there is a need for policy-relevant comparative data in areas where they do not exist or where existing ones may not be fully adapted to the goals.

The European Commission’s Standing Group on indicators and benchmarks has been meeting since June 2002 in order to advise on, among other things, the choice of outcome indicators. One of the contentious issues will be whether the European Union will be launching new surveys to construct such indicators or whether it will be content with what has been or will be produced by other institutions. I will argue that there are good reasons for favouring the former.

**The case for ‘European’ indicators**

One definition of a ‘European indicator’ is simply an indicator applied in Europe. But it can be argued that European indicators should have qualities that make them different from other national or international indicators. First, they deal with educational matters that are relevant only to the European countries taken as a whole and secondly they are constructed according to a methodology that is tailor-made to measure the objectives of education in the European Union.

To understand this, let us look at the characteristics of the current international assessment surveys. Their main objective is to look for relationships between outcome indicators and other indicators, either macro-economic or education-related, in the hope of assessing the efficiency of education systems and defining new outlines of national education policy in relation to national economies. In order to do this, the main concern is to design a measure that reflects countries’ educational performance. International surveys are therefore very often reduced to a comparative ranking, ‘league table’, where countries appear by order of success in the chosen macro-indicator. This then helps to reinforce the policy perspective given in the first place to justify conducting such studies.

The policy dimension is largely based on widely held economic tenets that hold that education is an investment necessary for the development of countries’ human capital and that there is a direct relationship between how good an education system is in terms of results and how successful the corresponding country is from an economic point of view. This point is repeatedly made in the successive editions of *Education at a Glance*, the OECD’s indicators publication. Many doubts
however have been expressed about the validity of such a model (Robinson, 1999; Wolf, 2002).

From the methodological point of view the current surveys also share common features based on the definition of a target population (pupils of a certain school level, individuals in the same age-group), equivalent sampling procedures from one country to another, the use of a large number of items and statistical analysis based on specific psychometric models, in particular Item Response Models (IRM), and more importantly the same test instrument translated into all the languages concerned. One of the main concerns about this approach lies with the linguistic and cultural biases that are inevitably present when a test instrument is conceived in one, or at most two, dominant languages (generally this is English) and then translated into other languages. Several researchers have pointed to this as a fundamental difficulty (Blum & Guérin-Pace, 2000; Blum et al., 2001).

Even if current comparative projects, PISA in particular, have introduced some changes in their methodology to try and answer a few of the questions raised, it is nonetheless true that their overall perspective remains very much based on the ideological view that education is primarily a tool for economic performance rather than a pedagogical issue (Bonnet, 2002).

Indeed, one cannot but notice that, for all intents and purposes, major international projects of this nature are currently dominated by North American agencies and Anglo-Saxon consortia outside Europe. Those appear, for practical and financial reasons, to be the only ones able to fulfil the requirements laid down by the terms of reference of the projects. This, however, tends to introduce linguistic, cultural and methodological biases which can affect European countries. Yet the technical and scientific competence necessary for such work does exist in Europe even if it is scattered among institutions in different countries. A potential danger for Europe can ensue if this competence is not brought together to allow European countries to meet demands that might be emerging.

It can be argued that Europe must develop its own methodological approach because there is a need to reflect the fact that most European countries take the broader view that the aims of education are not merely to train workers—even if this is an important part—but also to educate citizens and instil an awareness of cultural roots. To complement the existing international surveys it is necessary to develop indicators which describe education from other angles, in particular indicators based on studies which take into account the cultural environment and reflect the specific aims of education in Europe. Educational quality indicators need to be truly European in the sense that they assess European education by its own standards and objectives rather than by those of other regions of the world.

From this point of view, one may wonder whether it is entirely reasonable to use the PISA indicators to monitor one of the benchmarks presented above (by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000), as is currently being done for lack of any other reading achievement data. This should be reason enough to develop indicators which are different from those
produced by other international organizations, which they would also supplement so as to allow countries to capitalize on existing data. European indicators should be different not just by their nature, but just as importantly by the scientific approach leading to their construction and by the topics they cover.

It might be useful, at this juncture, to give a concrete example of what an alternative methodology could look like.

In order to assess the possibility of basing international comparisons on a different methodology the European Network of Policy-makers for the Evaluation of Education Systems\textsuperscript{6} decided in 1998 to test the feasibility of a new approach to comparative studies. As a result, teams of researchers from England, Finland, France and Italy, jointly devised a project for which partial funding was obtained through the SOCRATES programme. This was a feasibility study aiming to identify the conditions under which comparative, culturally unbiased data can be obtained from nationally produced test instruments using indigenous, untranslated, original material deemed by experts to be of comparable levels of difficulty between countries and to be testing the same skills at similar levels of difficulty (Bonnet \textit{et al.}, 2001).

The feasibility study set out to test this methodology through the assessment of reading skills. To do this it was necessary to agree on a theoretical reading framework which served as the anchoring point and from which comparable instruments were evolved in each country in the four corresponding languages. Once ready the instruments were applied on a national basis to samples of pupils aged around 15 years in each of the countries participating in the project. Linking devices as well as statistical and psychometric analyses were used to assess the extent to which the tests were measuring comparable skills in each country and across countries, and to formulate further hypotheses about necessary changes in the reading framework and other aspects of the proposed methodology.

The study showed that using indigenous material (texts and questions) in the original language of each country was feasible. In view of the near insuperable problems of translating and adapting tests to different cultural contexts it may well be that despite the natural tendency to resist the idea, the advantages of overcoming cultural bias by using indigenous material outweigh the difficulty of making the study comparable by not having a common translated instrument.

Looking at the findings of this study the very notion of international comparison takes on a whole new meaning, away from the traditional ranking of countries. Diagnostic comparison of reading literacy between countries through the diversity of reading skill profiles becomes possible. Diversity is no longer an obstacle but an integrated part of the methodology and international comparison can truly lead to national remedial policies, which is one of the problems with the current surveys.

It should also be pointed out that this project hinges on a new type of cooperative methodology where each participating country can truly influence the design of the test. This also represents a new approach to international surveys. So far, and despite recent efforts to involve participating countries up to a point, the usual way has been to have the methodology devised by an institution or a group of institutions with executive powers, with the result that each country was merely responsible for
implementing the survey by following rules set out for the purpose. In the present case all the participants constitute a learning community where each is equally responsible for the work undertaken in common. This is scientifically beneficial and motivates countries to obtain meaningful results.

There is an added bonus to this approach: considerable sums of money can be saved on translation and on implementing identical test procedures in each country. This financial argument is not a sole justification for doing things differently but there is no doubt that it is a consideration that policy-makers will take into account provided that the end product lives up to their expectations and helps to inform their decisions. Finally, this methodology allows surveys to be carried out more quickly than at present, thereby meeting the needs of policy-makers who often cannot wait several years for results.

At the close of the feasibility study several areas were identified where changes in the proposed methodology are necessary and where new elements must be brought in to improve the linkage between the instruments and the skills to be assessed, not just in each country but also between all the countries.

It was therefore decided to go further down this road and in 2001 an extension of the project was launched with the four countries which took part in the original study (England, Finland, France, Italy) together with four additional partners: the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Belgium (Flanders). This project is known under the acronym of C-BAR (Culturally Balanced Assessment of Reading) and its aim is to revisit and refine the common conceptual and methodological framework tried out in the original study. The work on C-BAR has resulted in a final report that outlines how a full-scale survey of reading based on this approach can be implemented. It is in effect a blueprint for constructing national instruments (selecting texts and devising question items) and using linking devices. This methodological approach could usefully be adapted to construct European indicators in a number of skill areas (Bonnet et al., 2003).

The idea behind devising new methodological approaches is that far from being merely a technical question, the choice of a methodology for gathering data and devising indicators is highly political. The results of what is measured are partly dependent on how the measurement is defined. More importantly, what you measure soon becomes a norm which in time will prevail and indirectly structure a given education system. Hence the danger that the ideology and representation of the world carried by this norm will impact on the definition of educational goals.

Going back to the main argument of this paper, it should be stated that European indicators should be in keeping with the main priorities of European policy in education. For instance, considering that mobility is a fundamental European concern, educational indicators should describe the extent to which national education systems make mobility possible. Hence the need for indicators on knowledge and skills in the use of European languages. Likewise the understanding of shared European values and attitudes should prompt Europe to obtain indicators about knowledge of its history and geography, civics, the environment, etc.

At the same time there should be a deliberate policy on the part of European Union
countries and of the European Commission to utilize the existing data and indicators published by other international institutions (IEA, OECD) in two ways. First, in using and refining, where necessary, the available indicators (for instance, the financial indicators) and by constructing indicators of European average and dispersion, and secondly, by conducting secondary analysis of the data to obtain specific indicators illustrating European policy concerns (for example, equity between and within European countries or regions as seen through the disparity of a generation’s attainment; indicators measuring social cohesion within Europe).

The primary issue, however, is that European indicators should be based on Europe-specific surveys agreed between all or some European Union countries, according to the relevance for each partner. These would cover, for instance, areas such as languages, equity and civics, but would also cover new ground, for example teachers’ and head teachers’ professional practices. There should also be an attempt to collect longitudinal cohort data to deal with the comparison of the ‘value added’ of schools or regions so as to bring out the policy dimension of external (socio-economic) factors on education.

Finally, European indicators should seek to establish a dynamic approach to evaluation by directly devising measures to reflect the diversity of educational policies rather than the more usual straightforward comparative description of the existing state of education systems. It is suggested that this will provide more useful information that reflects European educational policies, some of which might be of use to steer national reforms. This dynamic approach would also usefully be served by the inclusion of forecasting indicators. For instance, forecasting at European level future teacher recruitment requirements on the basis of demographic trends (size of new generations of children, retirement of active teachers) and global educational policies (such as development of ICT in education etc.) would allow governments but also European citizens, in the context of mobility, to see which teaching jobs might become available in which countries and where potential applicants might be found.

Supporting the development and use of specific indicators for Europe begs the question of the production of the data needed, both from a methodological and a financial point of view, and requires careful consideration as follows.

The issue of comparability for European indicators is crucial: do we need comparative systems as elaborate, expensive and time-consuming as those put in place in studies such as TIMSS, PIRLS or PISA? I would argue that there is no need for Europe to emulate such surveys that adopt a particular view of comparability. Developing less cumbersome surveys based on indigenous material, as suggested above, could also provide data perfectly adequate for the purpose. Granted, those would not yield the same type of comparability as other types—indeed, a thorough reflection on what sort of comparability we want is required—but are we sure they would not provide enough relevant and fast information for policy-makers?

The financial issue is equally central: will the member states and the Commission accept that to obtain the necessary monitoring tools for following up the common educational objectives they will have to provide the required resources and funding?

Finally, there is an intellectual challenge for European researchers. A number of
European scientists in this field have so far been content to work within the existing international framework provided by the various consortia put in place to implement TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, IALS, etc. I would argue that this has strengthened the power and hegemony of the major players outside Europe. While cooperation with other world regions is desirable, it also makes sense for European scientists to be concerned with developing new methodologies based on different approaches, even if those may seem unorthodox for the moment. Students of the history of science are in no doubt that there have in the past been countless instances where what is rejected one time has become accepted later. Rather than dismiss alternative ways of conceiving comparative assessment researchers may well find that new fields of investigation could be opened up, fields that particularly may hold promise for Europe. But this brings us back to the financial question: if only a part of what countries spend on participating in the current major international studies were spent on developing alternative methodologies, then considerable progress would undoubtedly be made.

Conclusions

In this context the question that arises is that of the ability and the willingness of Europe as a political entity to develop a common culture and methodology of evaluation. If member states are rightly determined to maintain subsidiarity in education to safeguard the wealth of European cultural diversity, by making sure that there will be no attempt at unifying curricula or teaching methods, they also need common methods to assess and monitor education systems, in order to promote the quality of teaching and learning in Europe. At the same time as it would reinforce European diversity, this would also help establish Europe’s cultural and scientific specificity.

There is a real danger that the prevailing international methodology will become the norm and will remain so for a very long time, thereby stifling possible alternatives and innovation in assessment. As a result of the current costly international surveys, sources of funding have all but dried up for other projects thereby making independent research and development practically impossible. If this trend continues European researchers will find that they have no alternative than to jump on the international bandwagon or give up working in this field.

It would be a major political mistake for the European Union to remain dependent on other international institutions to monitor educational achievements in the member states because in so doing Europe will implicitly accept educational standards with which European citizens may not feel comfortable. Such institutions do not have the same political objectives or agenda. Rather, an appropriate methodology and relevant tools should be developed, in particular to assess individual knowledge and skills, if Europeans are not to be forced into the maelstrom of intellectual globalization.

This is a political, a financial and an intellectual challenge which should be tackled in a responsible manner by both politicians and academics.
Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. The community programmes SOCRATES and LEONARDO DA VINCI are heir to previous programmes (Lingua; Erasmus, etc.) and are concerned, among other questions, with the promotion of exchanges of pupils, students and staff between the member states, in the area of education and training (including vocational training). In the 1980s before education became part and parcel of the brief of the European Commission, the then existing programmes were practically the only instruments at the disposal of the Commission to foster cooperation in education. Later the new programmes grew to include also the possibility of conducting surveys on the quality and evaluation of education systems.

2. The ‘open method of coordination’ is essentially an agreed process whereby member states are working closely together to create, at national level, the conditions conducive to the attainment of the common educational objectives. Applying the open method of coordination to promote the various objectives entails the use of tools such as indicators, benchmarks, exchange of good practice and peer review in order to monitor and encourage progress.

3. The ‘principle of subsidiarity’ is a part of the Community doctrine which states that policies that can be more effectively performed at national level should not be dealt with by the European Commission. It was felt for a long time that education should be entirely left to individual governments and should remain free of interference from the Commission. This perspective is now changing following the initiatives described in this section.

4. At the June 1999 Bologna conference 29 Governments in Europe decided to create within the next 10 years a common higher education area in order to facilitate student mobility. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the ‘Bachelor-Master-Doctorate’ structure are tools for this policy.

5. The term ‘Barcelona process’ is used to describe the procedures put in place to monitor the implementation of the common educational objectives. The practicalities of this follow-up were agreed at the European Council of March 2002 in Barcelona.

6. The European Network of Policy-makers for the Evaluation of Education Systems was set up following a meeting of senior civil servants during the French Presidency of the European Union in 1995. The Network is an intergovernmental body; its members are appointed by individual countries through the Education Committee.

Network members exercise varying degrees of responsibility in the field of school evaluation and monitoring in their countries. The Network is currently made up of representatives from all 15 member states (including both Belgian communities and Scotland) as well as Iceland and Norway; the European Commission is also represented, while Switzerland has observer status. Twice a year the Network publishes its own newsletter, EVALUATION. The aims of the Network are to foster exchanges of information about reforms and innovations in the field of educational evaluation and monitoring in the EU and to identify, facilitate and initiate active European cooperation in this field.

To implement this second objective the Network defines and conducts projects involving several countries, either on an intergovernmental basis, or through bids for European
Commission’s calls for tender, in particular in the context of the SOCRATES programme. National agencies or research institutions are then entrusted by the countries concerned with the implementation of the projects. This is the context in which the project described in this article has come about.

Several projects have already been conducted and their findings published. The reports are also available on the Network’s website: http://cisad.adc.education.fr/reak/

References


