Measuring teacher effectiveness in Ireland and internationally

16 December 2015

What this Note does

This Note looks at current arguments around measuring teacher effectiveness in Ireland and internationally. The Note is structured as follows:

- Executive summary
- The impact of having an effective teacher
- Lessons from international experience
- Teacher appraisal – the Irish context
- Conclusion

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Executive summary

Both here and internationally there are differing views on how teacher effectiveness can be appraised, or if it should be appraised at all. Those who recommend appraisal, contend that teaching cannot be improved if problems regarding instruction are not identified. Those who are against such measurement claim that it leads to undue emphasis on exam results and ‘teaching to the test,’ rather than the education of the student.

It is difficult to identify highly effective teachers on the basis of their characteristics on paper; such as teaching qualifications and experience. Attempts at measuring teacher effectiveness, in other countries, involve:

- using student outcomes as an indicator;
- evaluating teacher practice using outside experts;
- evaluating teacher practice internally, through colleagues and/or school principals;
- performance standards which require teachers to meet specified standards of instruction; and
- a combination of one or more of the above.

While appraisal may have negative connotations for some; the OECD TALIS 2013 results found that, for more than six in ten teachers, appraisal led to positive changes in their teaching practices.

It is widely recognised that teachers are one of the most important elements of the education system. In Ireland there is no established system of performance review once a teacher has successfully completed their probation. This contrasts with other parts of the public and civil service where performance management is routine.

In Ireland the Chief Inspector of the Department of Education and Skills has expressed reservation over the term “teacher appraisal”, which he believes implies a focus on accountability. Instead he suggests that the focus should be on developing reflective teachers and improving teaching practice. In order for this to happen continuing professional development will have to be properly facilitated for teachers and principals.

The impact of having an effective teacher

Although judging teacher effectiveness is complex, effective teaching is commonly defined as that which leads to improved student achievement.¹ Over the last two decades, a number of in-depth, longitudinal studies around the world have examined the impact of teacher quality on academic achievement. These studies highlight that teacher quality is an
important factor in educational outcomes. This section looks at the impacts teacher effectiveness can have in a number of areas.

**Improved exam scores**
Slater and colleagues (2009) examined the impact of teacher quality on GCSE exam results using data on 7,305 pupils and 740 teachers across 33 schools in the UK. The results indicated that a pupil taking 8 GCSEs taught by 8 ‘good’ teachers will score 3.4 more GCSE points than the same pupil in the same school taught by 8 ‘poor’ teachers. In addition, a US study showed that having high quality teachers for three subsequent years (2nd - 5th grade), compared to having low quality teachers, resulted in a 50 percentile points increase in maths achievement. Furthermore, another US study found that pupils who had a very effective maths teacher gained 40% more in their learning than they would with a poorly performing teacher.

A 2011 report from The Sutton Trust (a think tank) calculated the effects of bringing the bottom 10% of teachers in the UK up to the average level of effectiveness. They calculated that this could greatly improve the UK’s place in the PISA rankings. All other things being equal, in 5 years the UK’s ranking among OECD countries would rise from 21st in Reading to around 8th and from 22nd in Maths to around 13th.

**Positive impact on child’s educational progress**
Studies in this area have shown that teacher quality has a greater influence on a child’s educational progress than any other school factors such as class size or school resources. Some studies have also shown that low-achieving students benefit the most from effective teaching. Gains seem to be particularly large for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, a US study of low-income black pupils in Indiana found that the pupils gained an extra year’s worth of learning when they had effective teachers compared to poorly performing teachers.

**Positive economic effects**
The Sutton Trust report also calculated the economic impact of having an average teacher compared to a poorly performing teacher. They estimated that an average teacher compared to a poorly performing teacher would generate annually £240,000-£430,000 in terms of future earnings for a class of 30 pupils.
Lessons from international experience

Table 1 shows that 17 of the 28 countries surveyed by the OECD had regular school-based appraisals. These include Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Israel, Poland and Portugal. More detailed information on teacher appraisal in OECD countries is available here.

Table 1: Teacher appraisal in OECD countries (2011-2012)

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2008 found that, on average across countries, teachers who receive appraisal and feedback have a positive view of the process and its connection to their work. Similarly, TALIS 2013 results show that more than six in ten teachers report that appraisals led to positive changes in their teaching practice.

Some countries have introduced legislation on teacher appraisal. For instance Wales and England have the Education (School Teachers’ Appraisal) Regulations which came into effect on 1st January 2012 and 1st September 2012 respectively. Ontario also provides for teacher appraisal under regulations made under the Education Act (Ontario regulation 99/02). New Zealand has legislated requirements for the appraisal of primary and post-primary registered teachers under the The State Sector Act 1988 and the 1989 Education Act.

Although there is clear evidence that having a skilled teacher does matter, it is very difficult to predict effectiveness before a teacher enters the classroom. The most consistent predictor
of teacher effectiveness is years of teaching experience. For example, Rivkin et al. (2005) found that teachers in their first year of practice and, to a lesser extent, those in their second and third year, perform significantly worse than more experienced teachers.\textsuperscript{15} There is also some evidence that a teacher’s content knowledge of their subject, gained from relevant undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, coursework, or professional development is associated with increased student learning.\textsuperscript{16} This association is particularly evident for maths teachers who have received subject-specific training. However, taken together, teacher characteristics, such as teaching experience, undergraduate college attended, undergraduate degree major, an advanced degree (PhD or masters) can only explain less than 10% of teacher effectiveness.\textsuperscript{17}

The following are commonly used to measure teacher performance around the world:

1) **Value-added measures (using student performance as an indicator)**

In the past it was thought that teacher’s job performance could be assessed by examining the change in their students’ achievement since being assigned as their teacher (i.e. value added measures). However, the evidence base is mixed regarding the reliability and validity of value-added measures of teacher effectiveness. Some recent studies suggest that value-added measures are poor indicators of teacher performance,\textsuperscript{18} whilst other studies suggest that they provide stable, unbiased assessments of teacher performance.\textsuperscript{19}

Darling-Hammond et al. (2012) argue that teachers’ value-added ratings are significantly affected by differences in the students assigned to them i.e. statistical models cannot fully adjust for the fact that some teachers will have a disproportionate number of students who have greater challenges.\textsuperscript{20} They also contend that value added ratings cannot fully disentangle the multiple influences on students’ progress (e.g., the influences of students’ other teachers, as well as school conditions).

Furthermore, it seems that evaluating performance solely based on progress on standardised tests may encourage teachers to focus on ‘teaching to the test’ to the detriment of the overall breadth and quality of instruction provided.\textsuperscript{21}

2) **Internal and external teacher appraisal**

Another option for appraising teacher performance is the use of personal evaluation by school principals or the school management team.\textsuperscript{22} This approach has the advantage of allowing the principal or the school management team to form judgements of a teacher’s performance over time and to include non-academic components. This type of evaluation is
also harder to manipulate by the teacher, as it would have less specific targets. The drawbacks of this approach are that it may be subject to personal biases of school principals, as well as time consuming and costly to implement. Another possible method for evaluating teacher performance is to bring in outside experts, such as independent, external highly performing teachers to evaluate teacher practice.\textsuperscript{23}

3) Combining value added-measures with internal and external teacher appraisal

Studies have shown that personal evaluations and value-added measures of teacher performance are highly correlated i.e. teachers whose pupils have made strong improvements on achievement tests, tend to receive positive evaluations from school principals.\textsuperscript{24} The Sutton Trust report (2011) argues that teacher’s performance should ideally be measured using a combination of value-added measures and internal evaluations by principals, with each approach compensating for the shortcomings of the other, but also incorporating a third element – external teacher appraisals.

4) Professional standards

Typically, professional standards-based systems for teacher evaluation require teachers to meet specified standards of instruction. Examples include the National Board Certification,\textsuperscript{25} in the USA, for experienced teachers and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards,\textsuperscript{26} also in the USA, for beginning and experienced teachers.

Generally these assessments require teachers to videotape and critique lessons and collect and evaluate evidence of student learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2011) write that these standards are a more reliable measure of teacher effectiveness, than value-added measures. Furthermore the authors write:

“…they incorporate classroom evidence of student learning and they have recently been shown in larger-scale studies to predict teachers’ value-added effectiveness, so they help ground evaluation in student learning in more stable ways.”

There is also evidence that teachers’ results on standards-based assessments predict student achievement gains.\textsuperscript{27} Some evidence also exists that teacher participation in standards-based assessments improves their teaching practice.\textsuperscript{28}
Teacher appraisal – the Irish Context

The early 1990’s saw a renewed focus, within Ireland, on education and how it could be improved to meet the needs of a growing knowledge economy. In 1991, the government identified education:

“…as a strategic force for the social, economic and cultural development of the state.”

Teaching practice, as an essential part of any education system, naturally came under the spotlight. The OECD (1991) paper Review of National Policies for Education: Ireland examined teacher supply and training and provided a strong endorsement of initial teacher education here. However, the paper emphasised the need for teacher education to occur throughout a teacher’s career. In addition:

“The reviewers stated they believed that, at regular intervals, every teacher should satisfy certain performance criteria in relation to the processes of teaching and learning.”

However, in Ireland there is no established system of performance review once a teacher has successfully completed their probation.

As the Department of Education and Skills (2012) report for the OECD Review on Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes notes:

“Ireland does not have a formal teacher appraisal system for performance management, accountability or developmental purposes.”

While regular performance review of registered teachers is not established in Ireland there have been some recent developments to deal with underperforming teachers. In 2009, procedures were put in place to deal with cases of teacher underperformance in line with Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998, which provides for the suspension and dismissal of teachers by boards of management. Also, the recently enacted Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 will give the Teaching Council powers to consider complaints about registered teachers.
Box 1: Relevant legislation

The *Education Act 1998* provided, for the first time, a statutory framework for Irish Education at Primary and Post-Primary level. Under the Act:

- the roles and responsibilities of teachers, principals, school patrons, Boards of Management and the Minister are clarified;
- schools are expected to establish systems for assessing the effectiveness of their operations, including the quality of teaching;
- principal teachers have a responsibility to ensure the quality of teaching in their schools;
- schools are required to prepare a School Plan that includes the objectives of the school relating to equality of access, participation in the school and provision for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

Another important piece of legislation is the *Teaching Council Act 2001*. The Teaching Council, established on 1st March 2006, is an independent body designed to oversee the self-regulation of the teaching profession and is tasked with:

- setting standards for entry to teaching;
- keeping a register of all teachers in Irish schools;
- establishing professional education requirements for teachers;
- publishing codes of professional conduct and practice for teachers; and
- dealing with complaints about a teacher’s fitness to teach.

The *Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015* was enacted on 27 July 2015. Part 5 (Fitness to Teach) will allow the Teaching Council to consider complaints about registered teachers. Those who have access to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service intranet can access the L&RS Bills Tracker page [here](#).

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**The framework for evaluation and assessment in Ireland**

The framework for evaluation and assessment in Ireland was not explicitly designed as a whole system - rather it has emerged over time. The main components of the assessment framework are:

- **System evaluation** (e.g. State examination, Inspectorate evaluations etc.);
- **School evaluation** (e.g. Inspectorate, school self-evaluation);
- **Teacher appraisal** (e.g. by Principal, as part of probation, as part of school inspection etc.); and
• **Student assessment** (e.g. State examinations).

A more detailed description of these is available at the Department of Education and Skills (2012) *OECD review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes: Country background report for Ireland*.

**TALIS 2008**

The TALIS 2008 results show that Ireland has a relatively weak evaluation framework and that most teachers work in schools which neither reward effective teachers nor dismiss teachers who perform poorly. A summary of the relevant findings in relation to school and teacher evaluations are set out in Box 2.

**Box 2: Summary of 2008 TALIS findings on teacher and school evaluations**

- In Ireland, 39% of schools reported that they had no school evaluation (internal or external) in the last 5 years, compared to an average of 14% across the 24 TALIS countries.
- Twenty six per cent of teachers in Ireland had received no appraisal or feedback from any source (school principal, school management team, or external body) in the last 5 years compared to 13% across the TALIS countries.
- In TALIS countries, 28% of teachers agreed that a teacher in their school would be dismissed because of sustained poor performance, compared to 11% of teachers in Ireland.
- In TALIS countries, 26% of teachers reported that if they improved the quality of their teaching they would receive greater monetary or non-monetary rewards. The comparable percentage was lower in Ireland at 7%.

However, some forms of teacher appraisal do exist in Ireland (see the infographic overleaf for an illustration of teachers’ learning and development):

- The work of **student teachers is assessed** during and at the end of their teacher education programmes and the standards in these programmes are set and evaluated by the Teaching Council.
- The **Teaching Council sets standards** for teacher registration and recognition of qualifications and has developed and published a Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers.
- Assessment of teachers’ work is a core part of **school inspections** and feedback is given to individual teachers during these inspections. The results of these assessments are compiled in the formation of judgements about overall school
performance, but there is no formal mechanism to provide feedback on individual teacher performance to the principal.

- Newly qualified primary teachers undergo a **probationary period** with external appraisal, which is overseen by the Teaching Council.
- At post-primary level, external appraisal of newly qualified teachers is not established as a general element of practice. Instead, the principal signs-off on the completion of the probationary period by the teacher.
- The Teaching Council has, however, recently launched a pilot scheme, Droichead, which seeks to streamline the induction and probationary process for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers. In this scheme, appraisal of teacher performance is generally conducted internally by a **Professional Support Team** (including the principal, the mentor and other members of staff), but external support is also provided by the inspectorate as required.
- There are also **school-level disciplinary procedures** to deal with cases of underperformance. These are initiated by the school principal in the case of an underperforming teacher, or the board of management in the case of an underperforming principal and sanctions up to and including dismissal can be invoked.

Outside of the probationary period and cases of underperformance, however, there is no formal procedure whereby the quality of an individual teacher’s work is regularly evaluated. Nor is there any formal system for assessing the work of the principal.
Infographic: stages in teachers’ learning and development

1. Initial Teacher Education
   - Primary: B.Ed (4yrs.) or Primary degree + P.M.E (2yrs)
   - Post-Primary: Primary degree + P.M.E (2yrs)
   - Includes School Placement

2. Induction
   - Newly qualified teacher (NQT) (primary and post-primary) must complete programme of induction workshops

3. Probation OR Post Qualification Employment (PQE)
   - NQT (primary) must complete probation
   - NQT (post-primary) must complete PQE

4. Full registration

5. Continuing Professional Development

* P.M.E - Professional Masters in Education

L&RS Note: Supporting teachers and enhancing teacher effectiveness

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Box 3: What lessons can Ireland take from the international experience?

Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector of the Department of Education and Skills, has questioned why Ireland, unlike many countries, does not have annual reviews or performance evaluations of teachers. Dr. Hislop said that in Ireland:

“…… the lack of teacher appraisal contrasts strongly with the Irish civil and public service where annual Performance Management and Development Reviews are commonplace.”

Dr. Hislop is reticent, however, about the terminology used in the OECD (2013) report, arguing that the term “teacher appraisal” implies a focus on accountability, rather than improvement. Instead, Dr. Hislop argues, the focus should be on developing reflective practitioners who will:

- recognise the need to reflect on their practice;
- contribute to conversations with their colleagues about improvements in the school;
- be open to having their practice viewed and discussed by colleagues; and
- accept routine observation and appraisal of work by their principals.

This is in keeping with a view held by many educators; that teacher evaluation should be used for both measurement and development but that development should be the primary purpose.

Despite Dr. Hislop’s reservations, he highlights the benefits of having a more formalised professional evaluation culture in schools, along with the positive impact that feedback can have on teaching and learning. Additionally, he suggests that it is difficult for principals to address instances of underperformance, “if observation and professional conversations are not part of the school’s routine.”

Dr. Hislop recommends that (notwithstanding capacity issues) there be greater investment in CPD for principals to enable them to foster and engage with such reflective practice. Furthermore, he argues, that while teacher appraisal may or may not be appropriate; there should be dialogue about teaching, learning and standards in schools before any consideration of evaluation or appraisal takes place.
**Conclusion**

Effective teaching is the staple of any good education system. However, it is difficult to identify highly effective teachers on the basis of their characteristics on paper; such as teaching qualifications and experience.

Another means of assessing teacher effectiveness is therefore desirable and a number of options are available. It is important to consider, however, whether the aim of teacher evaluation is accountability or school improvement.\(^4^5\) If appraisal does not lead to improvement or contribute to the development of the teacher, it may not be of benefit to students.

While it is difficult to prove a correlation between teacher appraisal and student achievement,\(^4^6\) the evidence from TALIS 2013 would indicate that teachers do react positively to feedback from their peers and such feedback can benefit their teaching practice, which in turn benefits students.\(^4^7\)

There is some evidence to suggest that by creating reflective practitioners, the job-satisfaction of teachers and the educational outcomes of students will be increased. CPD has an important role to play in this regard.

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1. In academic studies a teacher's effectiveness/quality has often been examined by measuring their pupils' growth in achievement (as assessed by standardised test) over a specified period. This measure of teacher effectiveness is then correlated with longer term outcomes to assess the influence of teacher quality on educational outcomes.
5. The test scores used in the calculations are those produced by the OECD’s Programme for International Assessment (PISA). These results are based on the 2003 UK rankings, which have remained similar over the last decade at 26\(^{th}\) for Maths and 23\(^{rd}\) for Reading in 2013.
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9 In present value


23 Ibid.


25 More information on the National Board Certification standards is available here

26 More information on the INTASC standards is available here


29 The OECD (2003), MacRuaric and Harford (2008), Coolahan (2007).


TALIS, is a project of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which examines school evaluation, and teacher appraisal and feedback in lower secondary level schools across 24 participating countries.


