

NESET Country Report: Luxembourg

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Section 1. Main equity-related policy challenges

- **Some basic facts:** Luxembourg is a small country with 537'000 inhabitants of which currently (2013) 44.5% are foreign-born (1991: 29.4%; 2001: 36.9%).¹ Education is compulsory between the ages of 4 and 15. It lasts for a minimum of 12 years and is divided into the Fundamental school and Secondary school.

Fundamental schooling: There are 153 fundamental schools in Luxembourg with a total of 46'510 students (2011/12). The fundamental schooling consists of 4 cycles:

- Cycle 1: for pre-school children aged 4-5 years (One optional early learning year is offered for children aged 3)
- Cycle 2: for children aged 6-7 years.
- Cycle 3: for children aged 8-9 years.
- Cycle 4: for children aged 10-11 years.

Secondary schooling: There are 35 secondary schools in Luxembourg with 35'514 students (2011/12). They are divided into two main streams: the more prestigious general secondary and the technical secondary school; besides that there is a preparatory or 'modular' stream for students with problems to follow the mainstream curriculum.

- *General secondary school:* this stream lasts seven years at the end of which a secondary school diploma is obtained as a pre-entry requirement for university studies. It is divided into three years of lower secondary (7th, 6th and 5th classes), after which the mandatory school is fulfilled. The additional four years of upper secondary (4th, 3rd, 2nd and 1st) classes are devoted to specialization in one of seven different sections: modern languages, mathematics and IT, natural sciences and mathematics, economics and mathematics, arts, music, humanities and sciences.
- *Technical secondary school:* this stream lasts between six and eight years and consists of different training paths in which students are oriented according to their choice and performance level. Again, the first three years belong to the mandatory school, and the following years are devoted to complete one of the different departments of the Technical school (vocational, technician, technical).

Higher education: Whereas compulsory education (fundamental and secondary schooling) is organized by the Ministry of National Education, higher education is organized by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research which was established in 1999. Only since 2003 has Luxembourg had a University of its own, with three faculties offering the three cycles in line with the Bologna system (BA, MA, PhD). From the Winter Semester of 2005/06 to the Winter Semester of 2012/13 the numbers of students enrolled in the University has increased from 2692 to 6288. In 2013 47.4% of the students enrolled at the University were of Luxembourgish nationality.² In contrast to the data of the University, information about the 2009 introduced graduate programs Certificate Advanced Technician (organized by some Technical secondary schools) have not yet been published by the Ministry of Higher Education (statistical data or thorough reports are to be published later).³

- **50% migrant students:** The most severe equity-related policy challenge in Luxembourg is clearly the integration of migrant, foreign-born students into the school system, who make up, today, roughly 50%⁴ of the peer group entering school (2003: 40%).⁵ ⁶ However, in terms of successful school careers, the rate of foreign-born students entering the prestigious

¹ http://www.statistiques.public.lu/stat/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=384&IF_Language=fra&MainTheme=2&FldrName=1

² University of Luxembourg (2013). *Report 2012: Key Performance Indicators*. University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, slide 11.

³ Currently, there are 17 different courses of study towards a Certificate Advanced Technician, see: <http://www.cedies.public.lu/fr/actualites/2013/03/bts/index.html>

⁴ MEN (2013). *Les chiffres clés de l'éducation nationale. Statistiques et indicateurs, Année scolaire 2011-2012*, MEN, Luxembourg, p. 15.

⁵ MEN (2013). *Key figures of Luxembourgish Education*, MEN, Luxembourg.

⁶ From a socio-economical point of view immigration in Luxembourg could hardly be more disperse. Whereas the banking sector and the European institutions attract immigrants with an above-average background and with schooling options in the European School (<http://www.euroschool.lu/luxschool/home.php>), most of the immigrants from the Balkan and especially from Portugal are clearly below average.

General secondary school oscillated in the last 10 years between 16.5% and 19% of the peer group, and, accordingly, 81% to 83.5% Luxembourgish students.⁷ On the other hand, only 16% of the Luxembourgish born students will get no diploma (at least not in Luxembourg), whereas twice as many, 32%, of the non-Luxembourgish students will end their school career without diploma (at least not in Luxembourg).⁸ Moreover, 87% of the Luxembourgish-born students will finish their school career with no class repetition, whereas only around two-thirds of the foreign-born students are similarly successful; 8% of them will lose two or even more years to fulfil the mandatory school.⁹

- The example of the Portuguese students (over 30% of student population):** The equity-related policy challenge becomes particularly evident looking at Portuguese students, who make up roughly 30% of a peer group entering the Luxembourgish school system (more than three out of ten students entering school are of Portuguese origin, which makes them an ideal test case). Only 6.5% of the Portuguese students are likely to finish the prestigious Classical Secondary Education, which would allow them unrestricted access to university. In contrast, a Luxembourgish student has a much higher chance of success: 34% of the Luxembourgish students were successful in completing the prestigious Classical Secondary Education in 2012. In other words: A Luxembourgish-born student has a five time higher chance to finish the prestigious Classical Secondary Education than a Portuguese-born student.¹⁰ Accordingly, only 5.8% of the students enrolled at the University of Luxembourg are Portuguese-born (and over 47% are Luxembourgish-born).¹¹ This specific inequality becomes even more evident when we consider the enrolment numbers in the different cycles: In 2012, the Portuguese-born students represented 8.3% of the enrolled Bachelor students, 4.6% of the enrolled Master students, and only 1.5% of the enrolled doctoral candidates.¹²
- Instruction language / basic literacy:** Several factors may be relevant in accounting for these inequalities, but one element seems to stand out – namely mother tongue language and the language of instruction. Mandatory schooling lasts (ideally) twelve years – 4 cycles of 2 years, with an optional extra year of preschool education, and three years of secondary schooling. During these twelve years a Portuguese student, speaking Portuguese at home, is taught first in Luxembourgish, then in German (as the language of basic literacy), and if they progress to the upper grades of the prestigious Classical Secondary Education, the language of instruction will be French. So that, whereas in the first cycle of schooling (age 3 to 5), the Luxembourgish language is dominant in the classroom, German will be the language of literacy and instruction in the cycles 2 to 4 (age 6 to 11); French is gradually introduced in the curriculum at the end of cycle 2 and is assessed formally from cycle 3 onwards.
- Early division into two unequal streams at the secondary level:** At the end of cycle 4, students, who are then normally 11 years old, will be placed in one of two streams: the more prestigious General secondary school, and the Technical secondary school. The technical stream is further subdivided into different less demanding academic options (one of them, the technical regime, ending with a diploma giving the students access to the University: *Diplôme de fin d'études secondaire, techniques*).¹³ In the prestigious Classical Secondary Education, the normal language of instruction is, in the first three years, German,¹⁴ and in the

⁷ MEN (2013). *Key figures of Luxembourgish Education*, MEN, Luxembourg.

⁸ MEN (2012), *L'Enseignement luxembourgeois en chiffres*, MEN, Luxembourg, p. 11. How many of these early school leavers may have finished school abroad is not clear.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹ University of Luxembourg (2013). *Report 2012: Key Performance Indicators*. University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, slide 11.

¹² University of Luxembourg (2013). *Report 2012: Key Performance Indicators*. University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, slide 12.

¹³ See: <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/systeme-educatif/organisation-gouvernance/130919-organigramme-systeme-scolaire.pdf>

¹⁴ Of course with the exception of French, and, from the 7th grade, of Mathematics.

last four years it is French. In contrast, the dominant language in the different branches of the Technical Secondary Education as a rule is German. In both tracks, English is taught as a foreign language, but is never the language of instruction (with the exception of the International Baccalaureat programme, where English is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects in the four final years). In other words, a student from a family with no Luxembourgish, French or German language at home will learn at least four foreign languages in the course of 10 school years.

- **Three-language regime:** *De jure* or *de facto* Luxembourg has three different language regimes that are mirrored in the educational policy. One is that German has almost always been the language of instruction and basic literacy, that is, the language in which students are and were taught at school. The second is, that after 1945 (after the occupation by Germany), French remained the only legal and administrative language in Luxembourg (as opposed to the time before 1940, when German was used as official legal language just like French). And the third regime came about in 1984, when Luxembourgish was defined by law as a/the national language to be taught in pre-elementary education, for the purposes of integration and identity. In other words: According to the three-language regime, Luxembourgish belongs to integration and identity, German belongs to teaching and French to the official administrative life; a fact that has undoubtedly triggered immense, passionate and endless debate.¹⁵
- **Awareness and first measures:** The Luxembourgish Ministry of Education has long recognised these barriers and has engaged in nationwide discussions and sought expert advice through international consultation.¹⁶ The Ministry argues that there is a particular difficulty with children speaking latin-based languages: “the Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish children, they experience greater difficulties in mastering German language from its very beginning”.¹⁷ Based on the School Law of 2009,¹⁸ the Ministry has responded with different measures: These include providing information for parents of immigrants,¹⁹ and offering at the level of local communes, induction or reception courses for newcomers and remedial courses for different difficulties. These relate specifically to the language situation where special classes are offered – in addition to the normal curriculum – for Portuguese students to learn Portuguese, in order to strengthen the mother tongue competencies as a basis to learning the official three languages (Luxembourgish, German, French).²⁰
- **Weak evidence of effects:** From the age of eleven – after the 4th cycle – the transition to the secondary level (Classical Secondary Education or Technical Secondary Education with its different branches) is decided according to the individual progress as recorded in the school reports (*intermediate term and end of cycle assessment*), the opinion of the teacher and the parents, and the grades based on a national test in the school-subjects French, German, and Mathematics.²¹ In both kinds of secondary school, additional language classes are offered;²² and transfers between the two streams are possible.²³ However, levels of transfer have

¹⁵ See, for instance, J.-J. Weber & K. Horner (2012), The trilingual Luxembourgish school system in historical perspective: progress or regress? *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 25 (1), 3–15.

¹⁶ These initiatives were part of a *Plan d'Action Langues* (2007-2009), which resulted in the publication for the teachers: *Ouverture aux langues à l'école. Vers des compétences plurilingues et pluriculturelles*, MEN, Luxembourg, 2010.

¹⁷ MEN (2009). *L'Éducation au Luxembourg*, MEN, Luxembourg, p. 10 (freely translated here).

¹⁸ *Règlement grand-ducal du 16 juin 2009 déterminant le fonctionnement des cours d'accueil et des classes d'accueil pour enfants nouvellement installés au pays.*

¹⁹ MEN (2013). *Bienvenue à l'école luxembourgeoise ! Informations pour parents et élèves étrangers*, MEN, Luxembourg.

²⁰ <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/systeme-educatif/scolarisation-eleves-etrangeurs/informations-parents/enseignement-fondamental/index.html>

²¹ MEN (2013). *Que faire après le 4e cycle de l'école fondamentale?*, MEN, Luxembourg, p. 10.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³ MEN (2010). *La réforme des classes inférieures de l'enseignement secondaire et secondaire technique*, Luxembourg, MEN, Luxembourg, pp. 24ff.

generally stagnated or even slightly decreased over the last 10 years.²⁴ Drop-outs have the opportunity to enter a “School of the second chance” (e2c = *école de la deuxième chance*), with an emphasis on languages.²⁵ Similarly weak evidence is to be found among the current trends in higher education. Even though Luxembourg is extremely generous in funding every student²⁶ enrolled in higher education with an annual 7’500€ subvention, 7’500€ loan (2% interest rate) and up to 3’700€ enrolment fees,²⁷ the percentage of the foreign-born students having attended public school in Luxembourg is decreasing.

- **Summary:** The Luxembourgish authorities are very concerned about the existing major challenges that have arisen through immigration and linguistic plurality. Continuous and substantial efforts have been made towards communication, integration, and support. Nevertheless, data relating to the access to the Classical Secondary Education over the last 10 years (see footnote 1), suggest that these efforts have been largely overtaken by the increasing heterogeneity of the student population. The reforms indicate the limits of simply offering additional support to underprivileged population groups.

Section 2. Main relevant policy initiatives, reforms, measures; assessment

- **PISA results 2000 and 2003:** Similar to many countries in the world, the first PISA-results in 2000 caused a shock in Luxembourg: Luxembourg was ranked at the bottom in language, maths and science literacy among the EU countries.²⁸ Three years later, in 2003, the situation was only slightly improved but still far from being acceptable.²⁹ The curriculum and national assessments indicated that especially foreign-born students and students from lower social classes were performing poorly and this was observed clearly in international comparison.³⁰
- **Policy reactions by a new minister of education:** In 2004, a new Minister of Education (Mrs Mady Delvaux-Stehres) was elected. Given the weak student performance and the difficulties observed in the education system, the national government programme attempted to address the situation through a thorough reform of the entire school system (Kindergarten, primary, secondary, vocational), including governance policy both at the individual school level (the introduction of school committees and quality assurance measures) and system level (a focus on competencies and a preference for large scale testing). These reforms are still ongoing and have triggered massive and often aggressive protests, particularly from the influential teacher unions. The reform followed a double strategy that is accepted in most of the OECD countries, namely on one hand the emphasis on development of the individual competencies and of the individual schools, and the governance strategy to base policy decisions on output data derived from international and national assessment schemes.³¹

²⁴ Relevant data provided by courtesy by the Statistical Service of the MEN.

²⁵ <http://www.e2c.lu>

²⁶ That is for all students with residence in Luxembourg (regardless to their nationality) and for all students whose parents live abroad (also regardless to their nationality) but have been working at least 5 years in Luxembourg, see *Republication rectifiée, suite à une erreur matérielle, de la loi du 19 juillet 2013*, p. 3214.

²⁷ CEDIES (2013/14). *L’aide financière de l’état pour études supérieures*. Luxembourg: Ministère de l’éducation supérieure et de la recherche, p. 2.

²⁸ MEN (2001). *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA 2000 – Kompetenzen von Schülern im internationalen Vergleich. Nationaler Bericht Luxemburg*. Luxembourg, MEN.

²⁹ MEN (2004). *PISA 2003. Kompetenzen von Schülern im internationalen Vergleich. Nationaler Bericht Luxemburg*. Luxembourg, MEN.

³⁰ MEN (2001). *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA 2000 – Kompetenzen von Schülern im internationalen Vergleich. Nationaler Bericht Luxemburg*. Luxembourg, MEN, p. 81; MEN (2004). *PISA 2003. Kompetenzen von Schülern im internationalen Vergleich. Nationaler Bericht Luxemburg*. Luxembourg, MEN, pp. 88f.

³¹ MEN (2007). *Die Steuerung des Luxemburger Schulwesens*, Luxembourg, MEN,.

- Competencies and standards:** At the individual level, the reform focused on a strategy that supports each student to succeed as far as possible in his or her progression. Strong emphasis was placed on school development, in the light of which was created the Agency for the development of Quality in Schools (*Agence pour le développement de la qualité scolaire, ADQS*) whose mission was to offer methodological and scientific support to all fundamental and secondary schools.³² In addition, learning standards were defined progressively for each cycle, so as to offer a guide to teachers of the levels expected at the end of each cycle and similarly to illustrate to students and parents the learning content throughout the schooling. Assessments based on these standards were simultaneously introduced. Accordingly, new school legislation was drafted, discussed, adjusted, and finally presented to the Parliament. However, all measures faltered due to severe opposition from teachers, who challenged – among other issues – the (in their eyes) ideological background of large scale testing and its consequences. However, whereas the reforms of the fundamental schooling and vocational training were successful in the parliament the secondary school reform act is still pending.
- Reform of vocational training and opposition:** The first reform concerned vocational training; the legislative proposal was presented in October 2006 and triggered exhaustive criticism by the professional self-regulatory organizations, teachers, and politicians. It became evident that the reform had been conducted too hastily and improvements were necessary. Two years later, an amended law concerning vocational training was put in place in December 2008, addressing Life Long Learning and the development of competencies - defined as “a set composed of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to pursue a profession or a job”,³³ reinforcing the links between study and practice, helping the future workers and labourers to be successful in a dynamic economy. In the outline of the syllabus,³⁴ the focus on competencies (rather than only knowledge) and modules (rather than subject-matter) is emphasised.³⁵ Five major steps were announced, for the years 2011 to 2013: the definition of the competence profile (*Berufsprofil*), training profile (*Ausbildungsprofil*), framework curriculum (*Rahmenlehrplan*), assessment frameworks (*Evaluierungsrahmen*), and syllabus (*Lehrplan*).³⁶ The implementation met with severe opposition and the ministry was again blamed for not having thoroughly prepared this reform. Today, the implementation is not complete, for several organizational problems with regard of the modules and the individual progress have not been adequately resolved.
- Reform of fundamental schooling:** The reform of the vocational training aimed to improve the integration of the school graduates into the working world, but not in the school system. The integration into the school system was the task of the new law on fundamental schooling, proposed in October 2008, and passed some two months after the law for vocational training, in February 2009. The general idea of the law focuses (as in the case of the law on vocational training) on offering support to students and helping them to monitor individual progress and development of individual competencies, starting from evidently very different backgrounds. The law says explicitly: “The assessment situates the student’s performance at the same time with regard to his/her previous knowledge and with regard to his or her learning testifying the mastery of the objectives defined by the syllabus”.³⁷ It is noted, too, that this progress is recorded in the *bilans* (testimonies) providing information about the individual’s progress with regard to defined base competencies (*compétence de*

³² <https://portal.education.lu/qualitescolaire/Accueil.aspx>

³³ *Réforme de la formation professionnelle, Journal Officiel du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2008*, p. 3274 (freely translated here).

³⁴ MEN (2011). *Berufsbildung neu gestalten – Entwicklung von modularen und kompetenzorientierten Ausbildungsgängen*. Luxembourg: MEN

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁷ Chapter II, Section 3, *Journal Officiel du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2009*, p. 2986 (freely translated here).

socle), being defined as a guide for the transition to the next cycle (but not to the secondary level, see below). The basic/minimum competencies are defined in a legislative bill.³⁸ This student-centred evaluation regime is called “formative evaluation” (which is usually understood as a feedback-loop to the teacher in order to improve his/her teaching) and defined as an “essential factor for the motivation, the self-confidence, and the progress of the student.”³⁹ Accordingly, grades derived from the comparison of the performances between the students of a class were abandoned and individual levels of competence – evaluated with regards to standards describing five levels from ‘to be improved’ to ‘excellent’ – were implemented.⁴⁰

- **Special measures with regard to socio-economic inequalities:** The school law from 2009 responds to the unequal conditions in the different regions and areas by offering additional lessons to underprivileged schools. The principles of this so-called “contingent” (article 38) were defined in a regulation dated 18 February 2010.⁴¹ The law and the according regulation foresee the cost-neutral offer of additional lessons for underprivileged schools by following the principle of redistribution financing from very privileged to less privileged schools. In the regulation the additional lessons allocated to the communes in need are defined as “response to the needs in relation to the socio-economic and socio-cultural composition of the school population.”⁴² The individual needs for the schools are based on actual class-sizes and foremost on the socio-economic index, calculated for every commune by CEPS-Instead and can add up to 1.95 (additional) weekly lessons per student in an average class size of 13.33 students.⁴³
- **Reform of secondary schooling and opposition:** After being voted by the Parliament, the new law and its underlying ideas were presented to the public, and to the teachers and parent.^{44 45} Although the communications sought to present the changes in an understandable manner, they were only in French^{46 47}. Subsequently, the Ministry started to work on the reform of the Secondary Education. In 2010 a first draft proposal of the general ideas for the reform of the lower classes of Secondary Education was published,⁴⁸ defining (in accordance to the fundamental level) the competence-approach as the “heart of the reform,”⁴⁹ and shortly after, the reform plan for the upper classes was presented (2011).⁵⁰ These reform plans triggered a massive opposition,⁵¹ as had the reform of the fundamental school level, but in the case of the secondary level, the reform had to be postponed in order to allow more actors and interest groups to discuss the issue.⁵² Since the current minister of

³⁸ Règlement grand-ducal du 26 août 2009 fixant le plan d'études pour les quatre cycles de l'enseignement fondamental

³⁹ Règlement grand-ducal du 6 juillet 2009 déterminant les modalités d'évaluation des élèves ainsi que le contenu du dossier d'évaluation, chapitre II (freely translated here).

⁴⁰ More details for instance for the 2nd cycle see: <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/publications/fondamental/evaluation/documents-obligatoires/bilans-intermediaires-cycle2/index.html>

⁴¹ Règlement grand-ducal du 18 février 2010 déterminant les modalités d'établissement du contingent de leçons ... pour assurer l'enseignement fondamental.

⁴² Ibid, Article 2 (freely translated here).

⁴³ MEN (2013). *Circulaire ministérielle aux administrations communales concernant l'organisation scolaire pour la rentrée 2013/2014*. Luxembourg: MEN, p. 8.

⁴⁴ MEN (2009). *Enseigner à l'école fondamentale explications pour les enseignants sur l'école fondamentale*. Luxembourg: MEN.

⁴⁵ In addition, the minister personally presented the new law to the parents of the different school districts.

⁴⁶ MEN (2009) *Courrier de l'éducation nationale - N° special – Lettre d'information sur la nouvelle école fondamentale*, Luxembourg: MEN.

⁴⁷ The minister personally presented the new law in the different school districts in Luxembourgish.

⁴⁸ MEN (2010). *La réforme des classes inférieures de l'enseignement secondaire et secondaire technique*, Luxembourg: MEN.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 3f.

⁵⁰ MEN (2011). *La réforme des classes supérieures de l'enseignement secondaire et secondaire technique*, Luxembourg: MEN

⁵¹ As for instance reported in the leading newspaper „Luxemburger Wort“ <http://www.wort.lu/fr/view/reforme-du-lycee-un-projet-controverse-51766c3ce4b08127f96a29f7>; or in the „Luxemburger Land“, <http://www.land.lu/2013/04/26/mieux-r%C3%A9agir-%E2%80%A8%C3%A0-la-diversit%C3%A9%E2%80%A9/>

⁵² It has to be mentioned, too, that at the same time a reform of the status of the civil servants (to which most teachers in the Secondary Education belong) was triggered by a different ministry, which caused additional uncertainties beyond the school reform and encouraged negative or at least skeptical attitudes.

education abstained from a new term after the elections in autumn 2013 it is not clear whether or not, and if yes to what extent, the reform of Secondary Education will be implemented by her successor. For the moment the secondary schools are less focused on the individual “formative evaluation,” even the transitory regime is executed on comparison with other students from the same peer group.

- **Evaluation of the fundamental school reform: Three challenges:** An evaluation of the fundamental school reform (2009) conducted by the University of Luxembourg in 2012 (interviews and questionnaires) revealed that the actors in the field – teachers, school presidents, parents, inspectors, and others – did affirm the need for a thorough reform. However, they were rather sceptical about the specific measures.⁵³ In particular three points were seen as on-going challenges. One was the impression that the envisaged school autonomy was more a false pretence than a reality, the second point was the excessive bureaucracy (for instance the handling and the effects of the “contingent” of additional lessons for underprivileged schools or the administrative practices with regard to the school mission statement⁵⁴), and the third related to shift to the standardized competencies and the report of the student progress in the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*); the teachers denied the effectiveness of competencies and their evaluation for the individual’s progress.⁵⁵ Not even 20% of all the teachers participated in the questionnaire, and of them not even 10% agreed that the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*) would give the students information about their strengths and weaknesses,⁵⁶ and less than 19% agreed that the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*) would give the parents valuable information about the progress of their children.⁵⁷ The parents were a bit more optimistic about the value of the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*),⁵⁸ and the inspectors thought that the teachers were overstrained by the new regime.⁵⁹
- **Expertise on the crucial challenge of the fundamental school reform:** The result of the evaluation of the fundamental school reform (2009) led to a follow-up expertise concerning the problem of the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*) that was commissioned to the University of Luxembourg in early 2013. The analysis, based on the earlier report on some 50 interviews, revealed that the problems of the interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*) were indissolubly linked to the syllabus that has been developed in shortest time in order to serve the ideas about individual competencies and standards, that is to define the syllabus “along the line of the competencies to be achieved”.⁶⁰ The experts identified two major problems. First, the idea of individual progress in the individual school subjects was largely reduced to the individual speed of progress along a predefined detailed course of development of competencies only.⁶¹ In other words, the idea of the individual learning is limited to the pace of the individual learner along a pre-defined (synchronous) line of development and therefore excludes diachronic variations of individual learning. The second problem is even more evident. The transition decision with regard to secondary education is still largely based on grades resulting from comparative evaluation between peers.⁶² In other words, an

⁵³ Tröhler, D. et al, (2012). *Rapport d'expertise sur le bilan de la réforme de l'école fondamentale*, Walferdange: University of Luxembourg.

⁵⁴ This latter problem has been solved in a very short time once the results of the report were published.

⁵⁵ Tröhler, D. et al, (2012). *Rapport d'expertise sur le bilan de la réforme de l'école fondamentale*, Walferdange: University of Luxembourg, p. 29

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 86f.

⁶⁰ MEN (2007). *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle*, Luxembourg: MEN Luxembourg, pp. 9f. (freely translated here).

⁶¹ Tröhler, D. et al (2013). *Forschungsbericht zur Überarbeitung der Bilans intermédiaires in der Luxemburgischen Grundschule*, Walferdange: University of Luxembourg, pp. 13f..

⁶² Ibid., p. 12.

individual may progress individually rather satisfactory, but in the end it is to a large degree it is the performance comparison (with his or her peers) that decides about the branch of secondary school (classical or technical) he or she will attend.

- **Two major problems of fundamental school reform:** These two problems – the in reality rather limited range of the individual development and the transition regime to the secondary school level largely based on comparative assessment – suggest that moving towards individual development in order to mitigate the influence of the social and cultural background has not had the effect that it was meant to have. It is of course too early to evaluate the longer term effects of the transformation of the focus on the individual, but as long as the transition regime to the secondary school level and the secondary level itself is based on comparative evaluation (social norm in terms of comparing results rather than formative norm of the individual's progress) substantial effects towards improved school integration and better life chances for immigrants are not extremely likely. It has to be noted, too, that the strong and sometimes aggressive opposition by the teacher unions does not help to implement the reforms, either. Nor is the charged atmosphere helpful in finding common ground for improvements.
- **Substantial reform efforts and on-going challenges:** It has to be acknowledged that within very few years Luxembourg has undertaken substantial efforts in order to meet the challenges of immigration, integration into the school system and improving the life chances of the immigrants. As both the evaluation and experts emphasize, a broader public discussion, deepened academic expertise and more time for deliberation would have probably avoided some misunderstandings and protests and might have improved some of the central strategies. In sum, the question needs to be raised whether or not the school reform – again, it is too early for a final judgment – has responded to all different aspects that the challenge that high levels of immigration present. It is important to note that the reform focused on the development of individual schools and individual competencies in order to achieve more equity amongst its school population and to achieve higher school results.
- **Challenges affecting national rather than educational issues:** There is no doubt that these ideas and reforms may address some challenges, but it is doubtful if they can meet the challenges described in Section 1 in isolation. Two more fundamental aspects need to be mentioned that were raised in deliberations, but were not implemented in the school law. One aspect is the question of the language of instruction and the other the point at which fundamental school students are assigned to either of the two secondary school branches (classical or technical) as well as the criteria for orientation
 - **Alternatives in the teaching languages:** It is obvious, that the school reforms aimed at reducing social and cultural inequalities did not question Luxembourg's threefold language regime (described in section 1).⁶³ There seem to be sufficient good reasons to assume that – for instance – the implementation of two equal literacy and instruction languages, French *and* German, might prove to be a step in the right direction. For example, it might be anticipated that the Portuguese students will find French an easier language in which to become proficient in reading and writing. This would help their school career and improve their life chances more generally. It is clear, however, that this issue affects questions of national identity, as well as human and financial resources which are beyond the clearly defined scope of educational reform and would require the agreement of the whole government and not only the Ministry of Education.

⁶³ There may have been discussions, but in the result – the school laws – the threefold regime was not changed.

- **Age of transfer decision between fundamental and secondary school:** Against the background that any public school has to serve two rather contradictory aims – integration and selection/social stratification – and that in a fair system the former is the precondition of latter, then the task and obligation of integration grows, the more diversified the population becomes. Given the increased linguistic and cultural diversity of the school population and the rather crucial decision in terms of Classical or Technical Secondary Education there are strong reasons to think about postponing the transition decision from primary to secondary level for at least one year, giving migrant children more time to get adapted, adjusted and integrated into the school system and giving them by this measure more life chances.

Section 3. Proposals for reforms and specific measures

Currently, there are, on different levels, four different recommendations to be made.

- **Linking education policy:** As the evaluation of the fundamental school reform triggered in 2009 (published 2012)⁶⁴ and the evidence on interim reports (*bilans intermédiaires*, published in 2013)⁶⁵ suggest, the overall reform attempts might have profited from a broader background of public discussion (not limited to the teacher's unions) and collaboration with the (then still rather new) University of Luxembourg, which might have reduced the chances of aggressive opposition. Whereas the closer collaboration with the University is currently being (re-)organized,⁶⁶ an improved institutionalization of public participation is still a unredeemed desideratum. An organizational expression of an improved public engagement would be the setting up of a National Council on Education, composed for instance of representatives of political parties, of the economy, of teachers, parents, and of the University. The National Council on Education, presided by the Minister of Education, could be commissioned to coordinate the different sections of the education system, take a stand on relevant questions and challenges in education policy, and inform the public about the major challenges facing education. Paradoxical situations such as – for instance – focusing on the development of the individual's competencies in fundamental education and a transition regime that compares the individual's performances should be reviewed. A better-linked education policy would strengthen the reforms when challenging national 'taboos' such as the three-language regime. This striving for broader support could be facilitated by an improved coordination of the education policy and in particular education administration (for instance the gathering, analysis and publication of statistical data) in the two ministries concerned, the one for National Education and the one for Higher Education.
- **Feedback-systems and strengthening individual schools:** All in all, policies based on several assessment measures should be encouraged and primarily used as confidential feedbacks to the individual schools (or even to the individual teachers) in order to avoid humiliation and to provide information. These measures include national performance data, self-evaluation of school development plans, satisfaction of students, teachers and parents, external evaluation and are thus not limited to psychometric output data. School autonomy should be reinforced by professional leadership in order to allow school development with a team identifying itself with its school. In addition, teacher training should be further developed to meet the learning needs of the changing heterogeneity of the population and the global society.

⁶⁴ Tröhler, D. et al, (2012). *Rapport d'expertise sur le bilan de la réforme de l'école fondamentale*, Walferdange: University of Luxembourg.

⁶⁵ Tröhler, D. et al (2013). *Forschungsbericht zur Überarbeitung der Bilans intermédiaires in der Luxemburgischen Grundschule*, Walferdange: University of Luxembourg.

⁶⁶ For instance by the organization of a regular publication of a National Report on Education.

- **Two structural changes:** As Section 2 indicates, the thorough reform of the education system was conducted under the premises of several conditions that may have been discussed in the preparatory phase, but turned out to remain unquestioned in the actual laws. Two issues deserve attention, namely the trilingual regime (Luxembourgish for integration and identity, German for schooling and alphabetization, and French for public administration) on the one hand, and the transition regime between fundamental and secondary education taking place at the age of eleven years on the other. It is recommended to reassess these two conditions in the following way:
 - Enabling two equal languages of instruction and basic literacy, German and French
 - Postponing the transition decision by one year at least
- **Curriculum development:** As the expertise concerning the intermediate reports (*bilans intermédiaires*) in the fundamental school suggests, a thorough reform of the syllabus is likely to produce a teaching instrument, that, together with accordingly developed manuals and teaching aids, will help the teachers to fulfil their task of teaching, developing the individual's capacities, and to be able to report their progress professionally in a reporting system that is easier to handle than the present one and leaves more room for individual variation. This curriculum development should be a medium-term project in which, referring to the first recommendation (see above), both, the public and the University, should play an essential role, without impairing the political procedures and the autonomy of political decision taking. This applies to the secondary school level as well.

Section 4. Conclusions

- **Acknowledged need for reform:** There is no doubt that in Luxembourg there is a high consciousness of the need for educational reform with regard to meeting the challenges of immigration, enhancing school integration and improving life chances. Equally, there is also the willingness to finance the necessary measures. These measures can be identified in far-reaching reforms starting in 2004 which have focused on individual development of competencies in order to mitigate the effects of social inequalities. There may have been, at least partly, too much faith in the effects of large scale testing (outputs) and at the same time an underestimation of the aspect of development resulting from inputs (curriculum, teacher training, teaching aids) to the system.
- **Two major problems affecting national rather than educational decision taking:** These reforms are too young to be thoroughly evaluated. However, the protests on both the fundamental and secondary level as well as on the level of vocational training indicate too little coordination with those concerned, namely the public and the University. In any case, the trilingual and transition regime suggests the need of a reform that readjusts structural conditions in order to allow the already undertaken reform attempts to be more effective.
- **National Council on Education:** A core priority seems to be the setting up of a National Council on Education helping the ministry to deliberately develop and coordinate educational policy, linking it more to both, the public and the University, and ensuring by that a backed-up and coordinated education policy, that focuses not solely on statistically portrayed outputs of student competencies but on integrating processes that allow a thorough development and adjustment of the curricula in all their aspects. This National Council on Education would also help to create support in the general public (and the Parliament) in order to initiate and implement reforms that affect sensitive national issues.

