



Peer Counselling on Assessment Competences

*Vilnius, Lithuania
17-18 September 2019
Online
24, 25 and 29 September 2020*

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1 Overview

This report presents policy suggestions resulting from a peer-counselling activity in Lithuania. Peer counselling brings together peers from national administrations/agencies to advise a country in a process of reform and development. Peers provide the country with advice and feedback based on experiences from their own national context, and their recommendations are intended to feed into concrete policy solutions for the country. Implementation of the recommendations remains the full responsibility of the country that initiated the peer counselling.

This peer-counselling activity, which was co-organised by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Lithuania, focused on improving the quality of student assessment in the Lithuanian education system. Policy suggestions for the Lithuanian government and school stakeholder community address:

1. Support for the reform process (general recommendations, Section 2.0)
2. Support to teachers to integrate formative assessment in classroom practices (Section 3.0)
3. The design of a moderation system for internal school assessments, to ensure reliable and consistent marking at schools (Section 4.0)
4. The re-design of school graduation requirements, and university admissions (Section 5.0)
5. Planning of assessment reform processes (Section 6.0)
6. Conclusion (Section 7.0)

The first peer counselling visit to Vilnius took place on 17-18 September 2019, and included peers from four EU Member States (France, Ireland, Italy and Norway). This was followed by a second meeting conducted online over three mornings (24, 25 and 29 September 2020, with peers from France, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway).

The second meeting provided the opportunity to deepen discussion of key issues on improving the quality of student assessment, and to outline concrete next steps for Lithuania. Participants included representatives of Lithuanian stakeholder groups (teacher trainers, university researchers, test developers, representatives from municipalities, the parent organisation, the student organisation and of non-formal education providers), and of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Background and context

Lithuania aims to improve the quality and equity of its students' learning outcomes. The latest results of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 show that in reading, mathematics and science the mean performance is below the EU average. The proportion of underachieving pupils in all three subjects tested remain almost unchanged since 2015 (OECD, 2019), and is higher than the EU average and other Baltic countries. Gender differences in performance are rather small or not significant in mathematics and science, but they are sizeable in reading where girls outperform boys by 39 points as compared to EU average¹ of 27.

Based on lesson observations, the National School Evaluation Agency (NSEA) highlighted ineffective assessment as a major contributor to poor student outcomes, and it identified the need to improve teachers' competences for formative assessment (Lithuania Concept Paper, 2019). Formative assessment (which is sometimes referred to as assessment *for* learning, as contrasted with

¹ This EU average does not include Spanish reading results, as they are not available.

assessment of learning through summative tests) focuses on identifying student progress and learning needs to shape teaching and learning strategies. When embedded in classroom practice, it can support all learners to improve their education outcomes.

Socio-economic background plays a significant role in determining student performance in Lithuania. A recent report by the National Audit Office of Lithuania (2020) highlighted that without “*specific systemic measures to bridge the gap [in learning achievements of pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds]*”, it would be difficult to meet aims to improve overall pupil achievement levels (National Audit Office, 2020, p. 4). The report recommendations highlight the need to improve assessment of progress of individual students, to better support all learners.

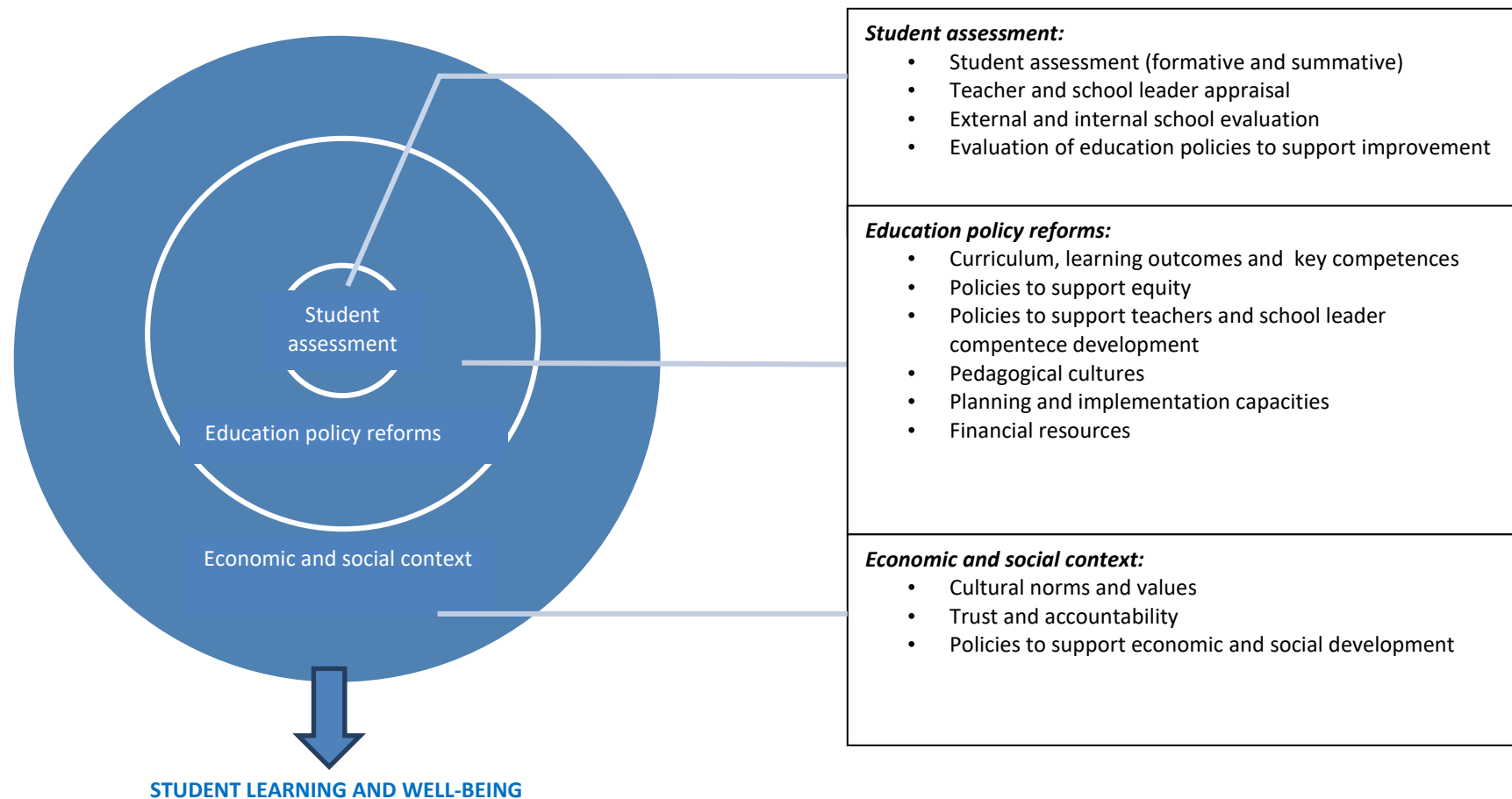
Lithuania also notes that its pedagogical culture reflects a “*strict academic tradition*”, which may create challenges to reform. During the peer counselling activity, it was reported that most teachers currently in the workforce have had little experience with constructivist approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Moreover, upper secondary graduation and university admissions currently centre on the Matura examination and centralised university enrolment procedures, rather than school and individual teacher’s assessments (Lithuania Concept Paper, 2019). These approaches do little to support trust in teacher professionalism.

The proposed reforms (See Figure 1) to strengthen student assessment in Lithuania intersect with ongoing reforms to strengthen teachers’ and school leaders’ competence development, as well introducing competence-based curricula at primary and secondary school levels - that is inspired by the European key competence framework, the OECD 2030 Future of Education and Skills project, and other sources.

Lithuania has developed a framework describing competences to be attained at different grade levels (grades 2 – 12). They include social, emotional, and healthy lifestyle, cognitive, civic, creativity, cultural and communication competences. Cross-curricular themes are being developed as a way to ensure coherence across different disciplinary areas. Teachers, developmental psychologists, and a broader set of stakeholders have been engaged in this process. New curricula and assessment tools will build on this input, and a first draft of primary and lower secondary curriculum was presented on 20 November 2020. In addition, Lithuania is now developing and piloting digital assessment tools and transferring external testing to digital platforms.

The impact of COVID-19 crisis, and the move to emergency remote learning in Spring 2020, on student learning is yet to be fully understood. The National Education Agency (NEA) informs that out of 15,200 candidates that took the National maturity exam in Mathematics only 68% passed it (82% passed in 2019). These are the worst examination results in the last five years, suggesting that the COVID-19 crisis may have had a significant impact on learning. For students who are still within the system, the need to provide additional support to students affected by the crisis is clear. Formative assessments may help to identify individual student learning gaps and ensure that remedial learning opportunities are developed to help close these gaps.

Figure 1: Ensure that curricula, assessment and teacher capacity support the overall vision for education and are part of a coherent strategy



While student assessment is at the heart of this Peer Counselling Activity, proposed reforms in this area are also closely tied to broad education policies, and policies to support teacher and school leader competence development. Policies related to curricular reforms, school evaluation (internal and external) and teacher appraisal need also to be taken into account in the design of student assessment reforms.

2 General Recommendations

The general recommendations set out in this section focus on broad principles for effective reforms related to student assessment (formative and summative) and upper secondary graduation and university admissions in Lithuania. They are based on advice provided by peers following intensive discussions:

- **Ensure visible policy leadership.** While the overall vision and policies set the direction for change, visible leadership is also needed to drive the reform process. Roles and responsibilities at the national, municipal, and school levels, as well as stakeholder groups, should be made clear. Visibility may also come in the form of national legislation or national initiatives to support pilot programmes, research, and the development and implementation of assessment reforms. *“There is a need to have the “big picture”, a clear leader and direction”* (LT stakeholder).
- **Develop a shared understanding of desired student learning outcomes and competences and the policy reforms and implementation strategies to achieve them.** New competence-based curricula, defining the knowledge, skills and attitudes students will need to thrive in life and work, are being developed and create the basis for a shared understanding. While the new curricula continue to place a focus on acquisition of knowledge, they also emphasise the ability to apply knowledge in relevant contexts, as well as competences related, for example, to personal development (social and emotional), citizenship, and culture. Recent developments include the setting of learning targets and development of new content for primary and lower secondary school curricula. *“The main thing is to make sure change is done right, with everybody following in the same direction from the start and everybody understanding what needs to be done”* (Peer).
- **Ensure that curricula, assessment and teacher and school capacity support the overall vision for education and are part of a coherent strategy.** It will be important to ensure that curricula are clearly written and are aligned with intended learning outcomes and criteria for assessment (whether formative or summative). Coherence across these different elements can ensure that each reinforces and supports the overall vision. It is also important to *“know what capacity is needed now, and what capacity will be needed in the future. Teachers will want strategies, and [will] need opportunities for training and professional development. This should help to develop understanding of how to deepen learning through classroom dialogues and other assessment processes that elicit evidence of student understanding and promote learning”* (Peer).
- **Ensure ongoing and inclusive stakeholder engagement.** Including stakeholders throughout the reform process will contribute to the reform’s success and long-term sustainability. Representatives from key stakeholder groups such as teachers, teacher educators, parents, students, NGOs, and other groups can ensure that a range of viewpoints is taken into account in the design and implementation of reforms. *“All the stakeholders are there. There is just a need to communicate”* (Peer).
- **Communicate effectively what changes are being made and why (including evidence of effectiveness).** A public media campaign can help raise awareness on the aims of new policies and ensure opportunities for stakeholder feedback, which is vital for building trust in the system. Such a campaign can also communicate support for teachers as they implement reforms. *“A positive focus on what is working well in*

the education system, and how things can be improved further can be ... [very] effective” (Peer).

- **Set and agree priorities for change by defining clear targets/milestones.** It is important to allow sufficient time for change and to pace ambitions. Having a step-by-step implementation and action plan will provide the necessary structure. This can be reinforced through school self-evaluation and monitoring of changes and reforms. *“Change is a continuous process, and you will always want to change things and do better” (Peer).*
- **Ensure that school leaders support teachers and set aside sufficient time to participate in school-based collaborative learning.** At the school level the buy-in and support of school leaders for reforms is vital. They can ensure that teachers have sufficient time for reflection, peer learning, preparation as they try new approaches to classroom-based formative assessment. In addition, moderation of teacher-scored summative assessments will require time for teachers to develop shared understandings of expected performance levels. This might mean reducing teaching schedules to allow time for in-service and/or school-based competence development. Teachers need *“both time and space to develop [their] competences” (Peer).*
- **Promote Lithuanian-based research to support evidence-based policy making.**

Lithuania can benefit from international research and best practice examples on effective formative and summative assessments. A stronger Lithuanian evidence base will be important for helping teachers to adapt new practices to their classroom contexts and to build on what is working. Cooperation between universities and schools may be supported through research grants that are directly relevant to school needs, and which establish terms of partnership between institutions. *“You have to make sure the change is your own and based within your own system” (Peer).*

3 Topic 1: Recommendations on integrating formative assessment in school classroom teaching and learning

Context

As set out previously, Lithuania's National Audit Office and National School Evaluation Agency (NSEA) have both highlighted the need to improve student assessment. The NSEA has observed the need to improve teachers' competences for formative assessment (Lithuania Concept Paper, 2019). Indeed, research has found significant positive evidence of formative assessment practices on student learning, including for lower achieving students. It is thus an effective strategy to support quality and equity in education.

Lithuania refers to the Black and Wiliam (2001) definition of formative assessment:

"Those activities undertaken by the teacher, and by their students in assessing themselves (that is, students' assessment of their own work as well as their peers), which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs."

Other experts have expanded upon the Black and Wiliam definition. For example, Clarke (2014) and Clarke and Hattie (2019) highlight the ingredients of effective formative assessment as including:

- Teacher beliefs that all students can improve.
- Teacher and student mindsets that permit healthy discussion of errors and mistakes, and which support high student self-efficacy.
- Ensuring increased motivation and ownership in students.
- Sharing learning intentions and co-constructing success criteria.
- Drawing on prior knowledge.
- In-lesson feedback.
- Developing effective co-operation among peers and activating students as learning resources for one another.
- Feedback (during lessons as well as on assignments).

Croussard and Pryor (2012) note the importance of classroom dialogues to elicit evidence of their understanding and to support deeper, more exploratory approaches to learning.

Formative assessment is thus seen as a dynamic process, being integrated into teaching and learning, and not a separate step following completion of teaching units.

Stakeholders participating in the peer counselling activity highlighted that formative assessment make student learning more transparent – so that teachers can “see the subject as students see it”.

Concrete questions

- How can Lithuania motivate teachers from primary through upper secondary levels in Lithuania, to improve their competences to use formative assessment?
- What are the specific steps that can be taken to support systematic use of formative assessment to support student learning in Lithuanian classrooms?

Challenges

Lithuania has identified barriers to implementation of formative assessment:

- Currently in Lithuania there is no widely shared understanding of the benefits of formative assessment or what effective formative assessment looks like in practice.
- Classroom-based formative assessment represents a significant departure from Lithuania's 'strict academic tradition', particularly at lower and upper secondary school levels. Both teachers and parents may resist reforms that depart from their own experience of schooling, or ideas about how students learn most effectively. Strategies to shift teachers' mindsets on effective teaching and assessment may be needed.
- The high-stakes Matura examination provides incentives for teachers to align teaching and assessment to the requirements of this standardised examination, thus emphasising test performance at the expense of learning goals (understanding and mastering new knowledge and how to use it in context).
- There are significant differences between schools in terms of the readiness of school leaders to support strong assessment in their school, and to provide opportunities for teachers to develop their assessment competences.
- Formative assessment may be seen as an additional task for teachers who feel or perceive themselves as already overburdened.

Strengths

- The introduction of new competence-based curricula will be piloted in the 2021/22 school year, and it will be implemented in stages beginning in the 2022/23 school year. The new curricula will provide the opportunity to introduce new pedagogies and classroom-based formative assessment. Formative assessment, with its iterative approach to identifying learner progress and understanding, is well-suited to helping learners to apply their knowledge in new contexts, and for learners to assess the quality of their own and their peers' work.
- The Ministry has observed that work is ongoing related to developing standards and criteria that set clear expectations for student achievement within the new competence-based curricula (Lithuania Concept Paper, 2019). New assessment tools, for both formative and summative assessment, are to be aligned with these standards and criteria.
- The focus of this Peer Counselling Activity on formative assessment, as a means to support greater quality and equity of student learning outcomes, demonstrates policy level support. In addition, the 2016 Peer Counselling Activity on coherent career pathways for teachers can also reinforce the need efforts to build teachers' assessment literacy. The previous Activity recommended the development of a teacher competence framework, articulating the basic competences that a beginning teacher needs and incentives and opportunities for teachers to further

develop throughout their careers. Lithuania developed a competence framework in 2007 to guide teacher development, and this framework is now in the process of renewal.

Lithuania is also now benefitting from European Commission support for teacher education, including three projects supported by the Structural Reform Support Service:

- A 2018-19 project to support three university-based teacher training centres to establish academic networks and improve initial teacher education.
- A 2019-2020 project focused on improvement of teacher leadership, the renewal of the school leaders' competences framework, and proposals for improvement of professional development and support for school leaders.
- A 2020-2021 project extending work on instructional leadership and competences for school leaders need for the implementation of new curriculum.

These projects present an opportunity to train teacher educators in formative and summative assessment methods, and to ensure that assessment literacy for competence-based curriculum is adequately covered in initial teacher education.

Policy recommendations

- **Establish formative assessment as a priority and communicate the rationale with stakeholders**, including international evidence of improvements in student learning outcomes (including for low achieving students), student motivation, student capacity for self- and peer-assessment and greater autonomy in their learning. A range of policy strategies to support formative assessment will ensure greater visibility and support for formative assessment, for example: policy dialogue with stakeholders; legislation; inclusion of formative assessment within the Lithuanian teacher competence framework; strategic investment of resources.
- **Develop a shared understanding of definitions and principles underlying formative assessment among stakeholders in Lithuania.** Efforts to develop a common terminology help ensure that all stakeholders understand the reform aims, and that they can support effective implementation of reforms.
- **Support instructional leadership in schools.** Instructional leadership within schools is vital for complex change processes. School leaders can set priorities for school-level change, ensure that teachers have time to collaborate and to share experiences with new approaches.
- **Develop tools to support formative assessment.** Tools may include guidelines, exemplars, and/or rubrics setting out performance standards and criteria to rate student performance. In addition, tracking tools, digital tools, and other practical teaching resources aligned with the competence-based curricula. Teachers may also benefit from guidelines and exemplars on formative assessment approaches in the context of remote and blended learning during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Ensure that teachers develop competences for formative assessment.** Create dedicated courses for formative assessment in initial teacher education and continuing professional development. These include competences to plan activities that will elicit evidence of student learning (classroom questioning and dialogue and classwork and task design), to activate students as agents of their own learning, to provide exemplars of successful work, to give effective task-oriented feedback and to adapt teaching to support students to meet learning goals.

- **Support partnerships between university researchers and schools** to evaluate implementation and monitor impact of formative assessment. The effectiveness of formative assessment practices will ultimately depend on classroom conditions, and impact may vary from one implementation to the next. Researchers and teachers together may test different approaches to understand what works well in their context.
- **Support collaboration in schools or across school networks** as a way to share effective practices. For example, these may include subject-area networks, school clusters, and international school networks.

Norway

Norway introduced new regulations on individual student assessment in 2009. These regulations established the student “right” to formative assessment, and to have their learning needs taken into account. Teachers thus need to understand each student’s learning needs and abilities, and to then give appropriate feedback and support. In 2010, Norway launched the national Assessment for Learning (AfL) programme (2010 – 2018) to support teachers across the country to develop their competences for formative assessment.

Under the AfL programme, students were also given an active role in their own learning and assessment. The programme is based on four principles of quality assessment. Teachers should:

- Help students to understand what to learn and what is expected of them.
- Provide each student with feedback on their work.
- Provide each student with advice on how to improve.
- Create opportunities for each student to be involved in their own learning process and self-assessment.

Emphasis is also placed on creating a learning environment where students feel safe to make mistakes as they are learning new things. During the school year, teachers assess homework, projects, and student’ presentations, and these may count toward final grades. Teachers may also administer assessments for formative purposes – to provide guidance and feedback to support students. Students always know whether an assessment will count toward their final grade.

Evaluations of the AfL programme have found that it has led to:

- A more learning-driven assessment culture.
- Improvements in understanding of learning aims in curriculum and more active use of it. For example, more frequent classroom discussions of learning goals and how they will be assessed.
- Improvements in teachers’ knowledge of formative assessment methods.
- A more consistent use of assessment terminology.
- Fewer appeals of course grades.
- Enhanced learning and improved assessment practice among teachers participating in learning networks established as part of the AfL programme.

- Local-level implementation, where local school authorities and school leaders have been drivers of the development process.

Recent developments include a renewed curriculum which emphasises the importance of formative assessment, and which includes subject-specific guidance on both formative and summative assessment. The new curriculum also places emphasis on active roles for students.

Norwegian teachers have indicated they want more training and support for formative assessment. The Ministry has developed web-based support, including articles, films, and an online library with materials for both teachers and students. Support has also been developed for formative assessment in the context of online remote and blended learning in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Ireland

Ireland has introduced a reform of lower secondary education in recent years, which included a number of interrelated initiatives:

- The Key Skills Framework.
- New Curriculum specifications.
- Support for teachers' professional learning and practice.
- New assessment approaches, which are broadened to include classroom-based assessments, which are criterion-referenced and internally assessed.

Schools provide both formative and summative assessment across the school years. In early primary years, assessment is almost exclusively formative. These are seen as part of a "learning, teaching and assessment cycle" which covers: planning for learning; teaching and learning; gathering evidence of learning; review of learning and assessment; and, reporting on progress and achievement.

Students are assessed through a combination of classroom-based assessments and final examinations. In the case of each subject, students complete two classroom-based assessments. After the second of the classroom-based assessments, students will complete a written assessment task on what they have learned and the skills and competences that they have developed in that assessment. At the end of lower secondary, students sit a final examination a maximum of 10 subjects. The final examination is externally set, administered, and marked.

Upon completing junior cycle, each student receives a composite Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) which captures all of the different assessment elements undertaken over the three years of junior cycle, as well as the student's achievements in the area of Wellbeing, and other learning experiences students participated in, such as participating in school's sporting activities and debating.

Recent reforms in Ireland place a strong focus on improving professional development for both teachers and school leaders to improve their assessment competences. This includes a dedicated support service, professional time for teachers, capacity-building resources, school clusters, and stakeholder seminars in which schools and teachers share their experiences in implementing new assessment methods and showcase good practices.

Teachers may refer to centrally-devised assessment guidelines and annotated examples of student work in for each classroom-based assessment across all subjects, including for

extended experimental science investigations, oral communications in English, Irish, Modern Foreign Languages, and statistical investigations in mathematics. These tools support teacher judgements of student work.

Recent reforms are challenging, and it takes time to fully integrate into practice. Sustained support is needed for in-service as well as new teachers.

In addition, ongoing challenges will need to be addressed, including the impact of high-stakes summative assessment dominates at the upper secondary level, which undermines the focus on formative assessment at this stage.

Italy

Italy has a strong focus on summative assessment. There are challenges to introducing new competence-based curricula and new assessment method, primarily related to the need to change teacher perspectives to a focus on teaching and learning of competences. To some extent, digital tools have supported teachers to integrate formative assessment in teaching by providing data on the extent to which students have achieved the competence goals set out in the curriculum, and areas where teaching may need to be adapted to support student learning.

Teachers participating in initial and in-service training and have found descriptions of the competence levels assessed in standardised assessments (as is done for PISA) to be very useful.

Italy has found that successful reforms must tap into motivations for change, involve all key players, and provide very practical tools to support teachers.

France

In France teachers have been encouraged to make use of formative assessment for some years. It is seen as a way to strengthen teaching practice and to support effective classroom interactions.

Student self-assessment is also emphasised as a way to support student autonomy. Communication with parents is essential for this to be effective. This is even more crucial when schools decide to eliminate grades. Some primary schools and, to a lesser extent, some secondary schools, experiment with comment-only assessments where students do not receive grades. In general, there is significant resistance from teachers, students, and parents to this approach.

In most subjects, students in France are also assessed according to competences and skills (i.e. their ability to apply knowledge in context). For instance, in foreign languages curricula and student assessment have been competence-based for many years.

4 Topic 2: Recommendations on introducing moderated teacher assessments

Context

Prior to 2018, decisions related to upper secondary school graduation and university entrance in Lithuania were based on the Matura examination. The focus on this single, high-stakes examination for a subject is intended, in part, to prevent corruption (Lithuania Concept Paper, 2019), for example in “buying” grades or paying for admission to the university. However, this single high-stakes examination provides an incomplete picture of student achievement.

Therefore, beginning in 2019, students applying for placement that are financed by the state have also been required to submit course marks. Admissions decisions for the desired programme of study continue to be based solely on the results of the Matura examinations. The Ministry is considering introducing a university admissions process which balances external and internal assessments. This could mean maintaining the current standardised Matura examination, but also including teacher-based assessments as a percentage of the overall admissions score.

At the same time, Lithuania has noted that there is a lack of trust in reliability of teacher-moderated assessments. That is, teacher scoring may vary within or across schools. This is due, in part, to a lack of clarity of assessment standards and criteria, leading to inconsistent interpretations of standards of performance-based examinations, and thus inconsistent scoring.

Research highlights that reliability of teachers’ summative assessment depends on the design of assessment tools and teacher training. In a review of the empirical literature. For example, the Assessment Reform Group (2004) in the UK found significant evidence that “finer specification of criteria”, along with descriptions of progressive levels of competence, support reliable teacher assessments (Rowe and Hill, 1996 cited in ARG 2004). Greater clarity regarding goals for student work ensures that teachers consistently apply assessment criteria (Hargreaves et al., 1996, cited in ARG, 2004) and avoid bias toward groups of students, and post-test moderation to detect patterns of bias and adjust judgments.

In addition to the development of detailed criteria, teachers may develop shared understandings of standards and performance levels through moderation meetings within and across schools and through the use of exemplars on how criteria are applied in practice (Harlen, 1994).

In practice, there are different ways to organise the moderation process. For example, in both Denmark and Norway, centrally appointed external examiners correct examination papers, and may also mark student performance on oral examinations (relying on national standards and performance criteria) (Kavli, 2019).

In the Netherlands, teachers mark their own students’ examinations, and these are then moderated by a teacher from another school, based on a central scoring protocol. A national agency links schools for the scoring of examinations in the different subject tracks. The school board ensures that scoring and moderation are done correctly. Further moderation by an external body is provided if necessary, although this is extremely rare as the correlation between rates is high (OECD, 2013).

In other countries, moderation may be done between cooperating schools on a more informal basis, although documentation of decisions is always important.

Concrete questions

- What policies are necessary to ensure that teacher led marking in schools is reliable and comparable?
- What support is necessary for such changes in school culture?

Challenges

- Lithuania has noted that there is a lack of trust in reliability of teacher-moderated assessments. This is due, in part, to a lack of clarity of assessment standards and criteria (leading to inconsistent interpretations of standards, and thus inconsistent scoring).
- Lack of trust in teachers' professional judgement, in general, is also an important challenge.
- Processes to ensure reliability of teacher-graded assessments will require that teachers, whether in the same school or different schools, come to agreement on scoring. However, to the extent that teachers see this process as a way to control or monitoring their work, they may resist.

Strengths

- For any given subject, the inclusion of multiple assessments can help to ease the pressure on teachers and students to perform well on a single, high-stakes test.
- Teacher-rating is more effective to capture student capacity to solve complex problems or to communicate orally than is possible with traditional machine-scored standardised examinations featuring close-ended questions.
- The inclusion of scores from additional assessments scores will provide a better picture of student learning over time.

Policy recommendations

- **Ensure stakeholder buy-in for moderated teacher assessments.** It is important to make the value of teacher-marked summative assessments clear to all stakeholders. A culture shift will be needed, focused on strengthening trust in teacher judgement, as well as teachers' trust in the system.
- **Ensure school principals are fully engaged in processes.** Leadership at the school level is necessary to build new assessment cultures and lead change processes. School leaders can also reinforce aims to increase trust and transparency in processes.
- **Consider decentralising the moderation process.** Marking processes may be orchestrated so that each examination is marked by a teacher from the student's school and a teacher from another school (following training to ensure that all have a shared understanding of standards and criteria). This may not only help to avoid negative associations of centralised monitoring and control, but also create opportunities for horizontal communication.

- **Develop clear standards and criteria aligned with new competence-based curricula** and grounded in research on student development. Standards documents may include examples of how these may be applied in scoring student performance, and across schools with different socio-demographic profiles. Clarity on what is being measured and to be clear about definitions of competences.
- **Introduce assessments that are more effectively aligned with competence-based curricula.** Performance-based assessments with observations of a range of tasks, portfolios and other assessments forms can capture competences, such as the ability to solve complex problems. Teachers may use validated scoring rubrics that are based on central standards and criteria to rate student performances. Rubrics typically set out categories for which performance is to be rated, with definitions and examples, and a rating scale for each component.
- **Embed training about how to mark exams in teacher initial and continuous education.** Teachers need the opportunity to discuss standards and criteria to ensure they have a shared understanding of what is required for different marks and to ensure reliability and consistency of marks. Guidelines and exemplars of how standards may be applied in different contexts may also support development of shared understanding.
- **Allow time for teachers to develop shared understanding of expected performances and for moderation.** This will provide help ensure greater reliability of marking across schools and will also a valuable opportunity for peer learning. As noted in the general recommendations, teaching schedules may need to be reduced to ensure teachers are able to devote the attention necessary.
- **Make incremental changes.** First steps may involve moderated teacher assessments for lower-stakes assessments, in order to pilot processes and identify areas where adjustments are needed. In early stages, it may also be helpful to introduce moderated teacher assessments in one or two subject areas (e.g. physical education, modern languages). Time is needed for change in assessment culture.
- **Ensure transparency of marking.** Create a system for documentation of marks, so that teachers and schools may address any challenges and ensure transparency of the process.

Ireland

Ireland has attempted to introduce moderated teacher summative assessments at lower secondary level in order to balance the high stakes of external assessments. However, teachers often view themselves as advocates for their students, and they have resisted taking on a greater role in summative assessments that contribute marks to final state examination scores. A lesson learned is that early efforts are needed to get teacher views on proposed changes.

Norway

Norway sets out guidelines on student marks for summative assessments, but it does not have any kind of formal external control to ensure reliability of teacher marks. Rather, teachers participate actively in peer networks, and are able to a common understanding of

performance and marks in lower secondary schools. Many teachers are also involved in grading external examinations, so this also helps establish a common understanding regarding performance expectations.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the award of secondary school-leaving certificates is based on school-developed, and centrally developed, national examinations, all of which are teacher-marked (with each counting for 50% of the final mark).

The school-based exams are constructed by teachers in the school, with some tests produced by CITO, for example language tests, or by other commercial organisations. Currently, the Ministry is considering whether schools should have had an assessment expert on staff (as has been recommended).

National examinations are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and are developed by CvTE and CITO. As part of the examination standard setting process, teachers and students are invited to comment on sample questions. The national examinations are primarily paper based (for pre-university education, senior general secondary education and two higher tracks in pre-vocational secondary education), although some portions are digital (for the two lower tracks in pre-vocational secondary education).

They include both closed and open-ended questions. For example, in the three lowest tracks in pre-vocational secondary education there are “practical examinations” in which competences and knowledge are assessed. This is one exam, that can take 900 minutes (so a few days).

The national examinations are marked by the students’ own teachers, based on scoring guidelines provided. There is a second scorer from another school, who does not know the student or their teacher. The national inspectorate checks whether the school-based and central examinations are in line, and if the schools assesses all topics of a subject as required. This is a quality control of the whole examination process (school- and central examination). Samples of scores are also sent to CITO for quality control.

Final decisions on school graduation are based on both school marks and central examination. Each of them counts for 50% of the overall grade. Each student may re-sit the central examination, with the highest mark being taken into account.

In 2020, schools in the Netherlands moved to emergency remote learning during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis. Decisions on graduation were based on school examinations only, as the national examination was cancelled. This resulted in complaints, as some students focus study efforts on the national examination. There were additional opportunities to re-take the school-based assessments in June. These assessments were also teacher-developed and scored. These assessments measured all school-assessed topics from the last two years.

5 Topic 3: Recommendations on reforming school graduation and university admissions

Context

In Lithuania, the results of the Matura examination serve two purposes:

- Certification at the end of secondary education (a minimum of 2 subject area examinations).
- Ranking for entrance to and financial support for university studies.

Since 2019, students seeking a state-financed placement in a higher education institution have been required to submit results of the Matura examination as well as course marks from their last year of upper secondary studies. However, if the student has earned certification, the student may apply for entrance to university on the basis of the Matura examination results (without marks included in calculation of the score). The examination therefore continues to have extremely high stakes for students seeking state-financed placement.

All students must take a 'mother tongue' examination, choosing to take either the state examination or one designed by the school. The remaining 11 examinations are state-designed examinations. Tasks are based on the national curriculum requirements. The examinations include different types of tasks, with some placing greater emphasis on disciplinary knowledge and skills and others focusing more on application of knowledge.

More than 70 % of all examination tasks are open ended. They are scored by secondary school teachers who have been trained to apply standards and criteria. Examination results are based on a 100 point scale. The assessors are externally appointed, and scoring is carried out in designated examination centres using a double-blind approach. E-marking tools are also used. The examinations are scored by externally appointed assessors in the designated examination centres.

Students may apply to several study programmes in different universities through a centralised admission system. Admissions, which are competitive, are based on the student Matura examination results, and their final average mark in the subjects they wish to pursue at the schools to which they apply.

Since 2018, students have had the option to prepare projects in lieu of the final examination to earn their Matura. This can be done for all subjects. The results of the Matura project are then combined with the students' grades. About 200 of 30,000 students take this option.

As described under topic 2, Lithuania is considering introducing a university admissions process which balances external and internal assessments. This could mean maintaining the current standardised Matura examination, but also including teacher-based assessments as a percentage of the overall admissions score. Decisions were put on hold due to the pandemic, but they are expected to be introduced in the near future, following appointment of a new Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

On a more general level, inclusion of both external and internal assessments will also require that higher education institutions trust teachers' professional judgments (OECD, 2013). Lithuania has launched reforms to strengthen teacher training and offer better working conditions, for example through full-time pay. Assessment reforms, if shown to result in valid and reliable assessments of student learning, may also reinforce teacher professionalism.

Concrete questions

- How to balance external and internal school assessments for school graduation?
- What are the examples of assessing competences and recognizing them as part of compulsory school graduation requirements in other countries?

Challenges

- The strong focus on the Matura examination as the sole measure of student attainment influences “teaching to the test” (with this narrow focus meaning that not all curricular elements are included).
- While many universities have not required high scores on the Matura examination for admission, this high-stakes examination nevertheless is seen to have a negative effect on student well-being.
- In addition, there is a lack of coordination between different authorities and agencies and stakeholders regarding the design and use of the Matura examination.

Strengths

- Including both internal and external assessment results for upper secondary school graduation and university entrance may reduce pressure on students, teachers and parents.
- A more balanced set of assessment data can provide a more realistic picture of student performance over time.

Policy suggestions

- **Bring together university and school-system stakeholders to create a shared understanding of standards, expectations for quality, and the implications of new competence-based approaches.** Cooperation and communication between teachers, and examination bodies and other stakeholders (parents, employers) is needed so that everybody is speaking the same language and shares objectives.
- **Establish a balance of internal/external assessments** to relieve high stakes of a single exam and provide a better view of student performance over time. Decisions on the percentage of the final examination and of school-based assessments are needed.
- **Ensure implementation of the minimum entry requirements for universities.** Lithuania notes that although new, stricter requirements for university admission have been introduced, they are not implemented. This is because universities receive funding according to the number of students. However, low standards for admission may result in lower teacher and student motivation.

Ireland

In Ireland, a Transitions Reform Steering Group was established by the Department of Education and Skills in 2011. It is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills. Its membership includes: the Ireland Higher Education Authority, which is the central governmental body with statutory authority for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the overall system; and, the National Council for the Curriculum and Assessment, which leads developments in school-level curriculum and assessment and supports implementation. Other members are the State Examination Commission (SEC), SOLAS, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA).

The Group has been working collaboratively to develop and agree proposals to improve the transition experience of young people moving from second level to higher education, and to bring about progressive and incremental enhancements. The central focus of this work has been to agree reforms of the Leaving Certificate assessment and grading, and the admissions processes to higher education, in order to mitigate some of the undesirable effects of the so-called 'points system'.

In 2017, the work of the group resulted in the Department of Education and Skills changing the Leaving Certificate grading scale. The new grading scale now has 8 grade bands whereas previously there were 14 grade bands. As a result of the changes to the Leaving Certificate Grading Scale, the Common Points Scale used by higher education institutions (HEIs) to determine entry has been revised to reflect these changes.

It remains the position that the six best scores, in recognised subjects, in one Leaving Certificate Examination will be counted for points computation for HE entry. The reforms were designed to help to reduce the pressure on students at exam time and enable them to have a broader and more-rounded learning experience in their Senior Cycle.

France

In France, there is a 20-point grading scale, with 20 as the top grade, and 10 the average grade needed to earn a diploma. Based on the 2019 reform of the French Baccalaureate (upper secondary school graduation), school-based continuous assessments are now 40% of students' final overall grade: 10% based on two final years' results in teacher devised tests taken in core subjects, 30% based on two final years' results in school-based tests devised nationally in core subjects.

Students take their final national examinations in four subjects French, philosophy and 2 specialities, or majors, chosen by the student, and a "grand oral" which is a final oral examination based on one or two majors. The results count for 60% of final total grade.

Student final scores are based on both internal and external assessments. Internal assessments are formally moderated within and across schools, using national marking grids. External assessments are moderated through national marking grids, and through institutional meetings of markers chaired by a regional inspector. At the end, there is a final formal moderation process for both internal and external assessments with a jury of teachers chaired by an academic, as the final examinations also serve for decisions on university entrance.

France has a dual system. On the one hand, vocational colleges and schools of higher education are selective. On the other hand, academically oriented universities are not highly selective, and an upper secondary-school diploma (baccalaureate) provides near automatic

access. Any student can study any subject, with the exception of a few areas like medicine or high-demand subjects (e.g., psychology, sport sciences).

However, there is a failure rate of about 40% for first year students. Those that fail in the first year can try again as many times as they wish. About half of those who try again do succeed. The high failure rate has led the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research to provide information, guidance and strong recommendations for students during the admissions process for both selective and non-selective higher education institutions.

Norway

In Norway, university admission requirements include proof of completion of the three-year upper secondary general education programme or upper secondary vocational education. A student's grade point average is based on their final marks in each subject and in their final written examinations in two subjects, as well as one oral examination.

Overall grades have for each subject have a greater weight in graduation decisions. Students may earn additional points: for example, a science or foreign language specialisation, or based on gender for those subjects where there is a gender imbalance.

Most students do not sit university entrance examinations; they are only required for a few specialised studies (e.g. music, theatre). However, for some studies there is limited access, and the points required for admission can be very high.

6 Concrete steps for planning and implementation of student assessment reforms

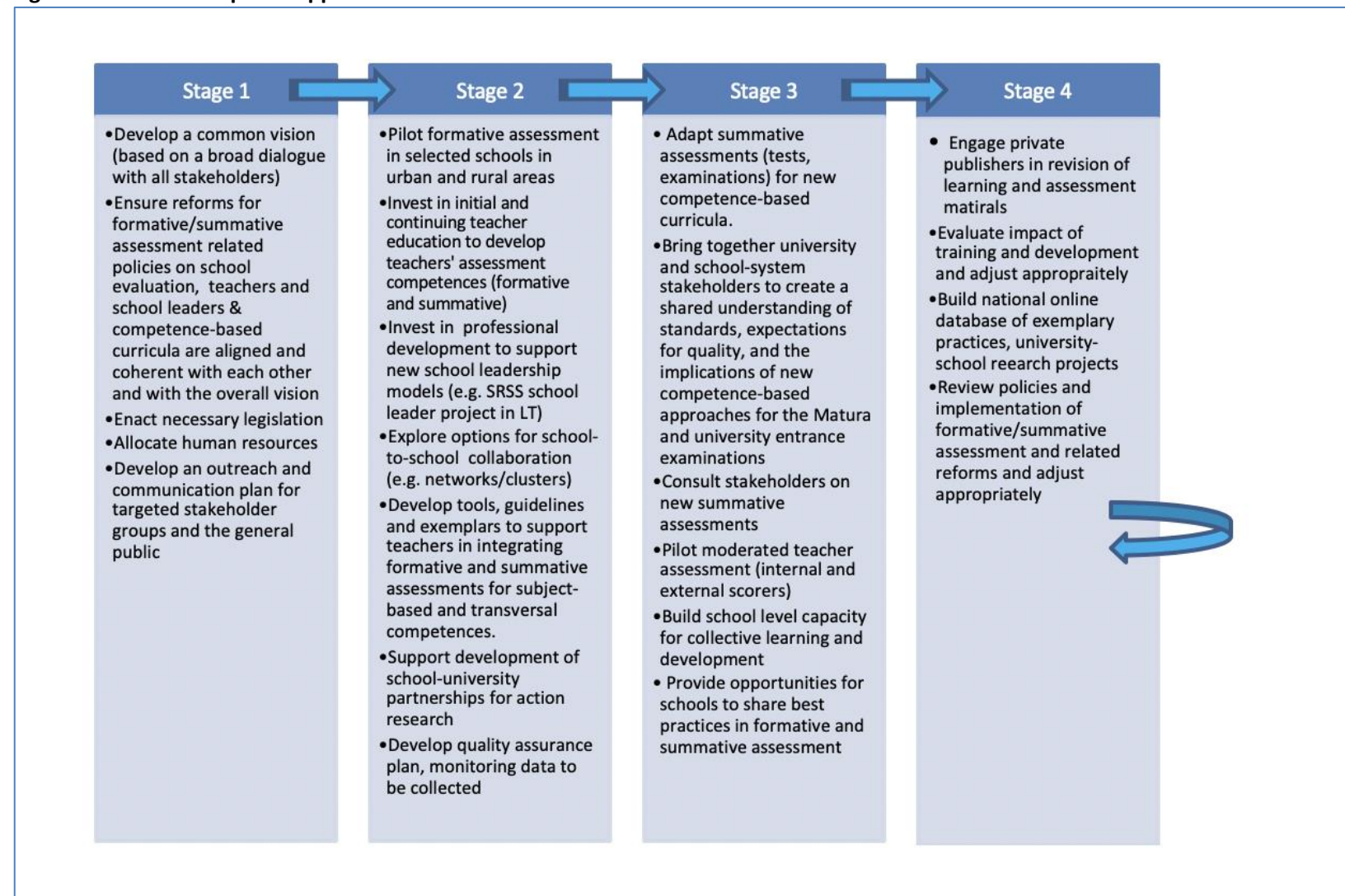
As a final step for this peer counselling activity, participants from the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport set out concrete action steps to introduce assessment reforms. Figure 2 presents the steps to be taken in the design of an overall coherent framework for student assessment (formative and summative).

Lithuania is still in the early stages of assessment reform. Each of the concrete actions set out below will require further planning, including specific steps to be taken and a timeline. The Ministry has the lead responsibility for many of these steps (particularly for Stage 1 steps). However, as reforms progress, municipalities, networks, and school-level stakeholders should also take on greater responsibilities for design and implementation of new assessment approaches and tools, and peer networking to share effective practices and discuss challenges. The Ministry itself will continue to monitor reform and identify areas for further improvement.

The Ministry should also have the lead responsibility for ensuring coherence with new competence-based curricula, and reforms to support teacher and school leaders are now under development. Reforms to student assessment will need to be coordinated with and linked to these reforms. The peer counselling activity itself has served to engage a broad set of stakeholders.

Ministry participants noted that although they have set out a sequence of steps to be taken over time, the design and implementation process should not be considered as linear. These initial plans will also need to be planned in concert with the ongoing reforms for the development of teacher and school leader competences and the introduction of competence-based curricula.

Figure 2: Concrete steps to support student assessment reforms



Source: Author

7 Conclusion

This report sets out recommendations on strategies to strengthen classroom-based formative assessment and teacher-moderated summative assessments. Formative assessment can be an effective approach to identify individual student needs and thus support all learners to achieve better results. With the introduction of new competence-based curricula, plans are for teachers to take on a stronger role in summative assessment. Moderated-teacher assessments can ensure reliability of performance-based summative assessments of student competences.

Each of the peer counsellors shared their own country's approach to student assessment policies and practices. They highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in reform processes to ensure stakeholder buy-in and sustainability of reforms. They also noted that ongoing communication with stakeholder groups and with the broader public will also be vital. Investments in teacher and school leader initial training and professional development are also needed. At the school level, peer counsellors emphasised that school leader buy-in is vital. Strong instructional leadership and support for teachers' collective learning can support change processes. Participation in school networks and/or clusters can also expand opportunities for learning and development.

Concrete implementation plans can help keep reforms on track. Peer counsellors advised that an incremental approach to change can support long-term success and commitment. Each of the steps outlined in Section 6.0 will require further detailed planning, and attention to evaluation and improvement over time.

Lithuania has set an ambitious agenda for change. Reforms to student assessment are closely linked to other ongoing reforms related to teacher and school leader careers, and to the introduction of competence-based curricula. Next steps in assessment reforms will need to be carefully coordinated with these parallel efforts. In addition, greater attention to monitoring and evaluation will be needed.

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