



المركز الإقليمي للتخطيط التربوي  
Regional Center for Educational Planning

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# POLICY BRIEF

# Teacher Appraisal

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December 2019



## Disclaimer

**This working paper was commissioned by the Regional Center for Educational Planning (RCEP) - UNESCO in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. The paper falls under RCEP’s second strategic objective, which is to “produce and disseminate knowledge in support of education policies to enable planning of educational systems.” The content of this policy brief has only been minorly edited by the RCEP team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to RCEP.**

## 1-Introduction

Teacher appraisal – also known as teacher evaluation – refers to the process through which judgements about teacher quality are made and it is widely recognised to be a key element in effective educational systems. In recognition of this, the Regional Center for Educational Planning (RCEP) has published a working paper (Borg, 2019) which analyses contemporary international perspectives on teacher appraisal and makes recommendations for the effective implementation of teacher appraisal systems. This Policy Brief summarises the key points from that working paper.

## 2-Rationale for Teacher Appraisal

Figure 1 summarises three reasons why teacher appraisal is an important component of an educational system.

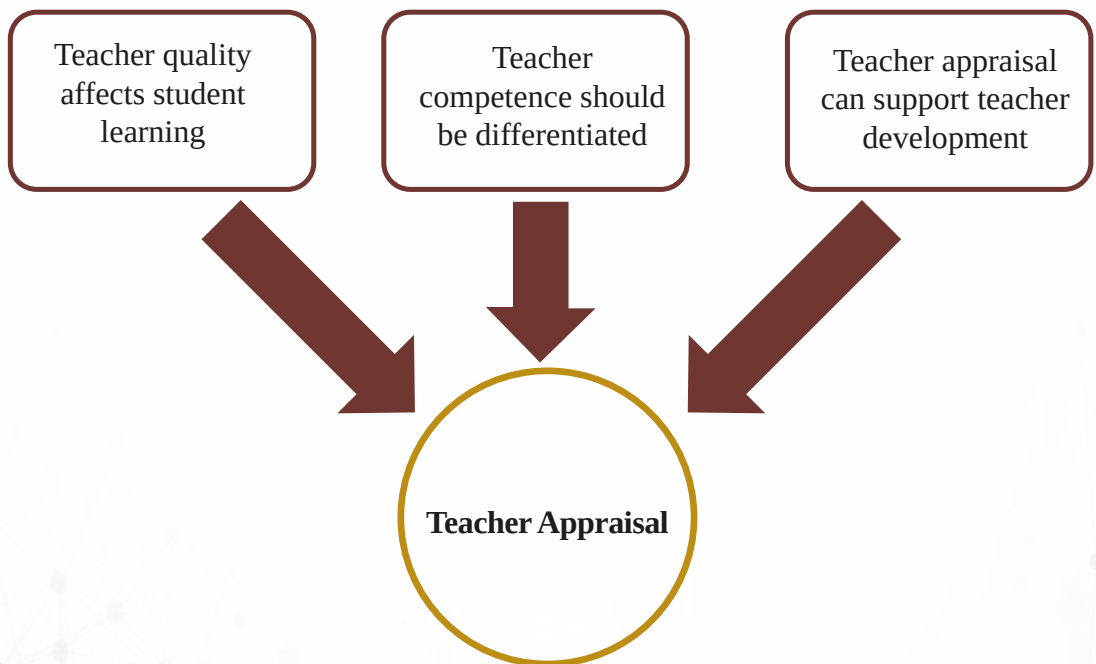


Figure 1: Rationale for teacher appraisal

First, it is well-established that teacher quality is the most significant school-related influence on student achievement (Opper, 2019). Teacher appraisal is important because it provides insight into teacher quality which can be acted on to improve student learning outcomes. Second, it is also important for education systems to differentiate among teachers with varying levels of competence (Glazerman et al., 2011). Teachers who are performing well can be acknowledged while those who are under-performing can be given access to appropriate forms of support. An effective teacher appraisal system enables differentiation of this kind. Finally, teacher appraisal has an important formative role to play in improving teacher quality. OECD (2018) concludes that one feature of high-performing schools is ‘teacher-appraisal mechanisms ... with a strong focus on teachers’ continuous improvement’ (p. 24).

### 3-Designing Teacher Appraisal

Teacher appraisal is a multi-faceted process, and Figure 2 highlights a range of key issues that need to be considered when teacher appraisal systems are being designed.

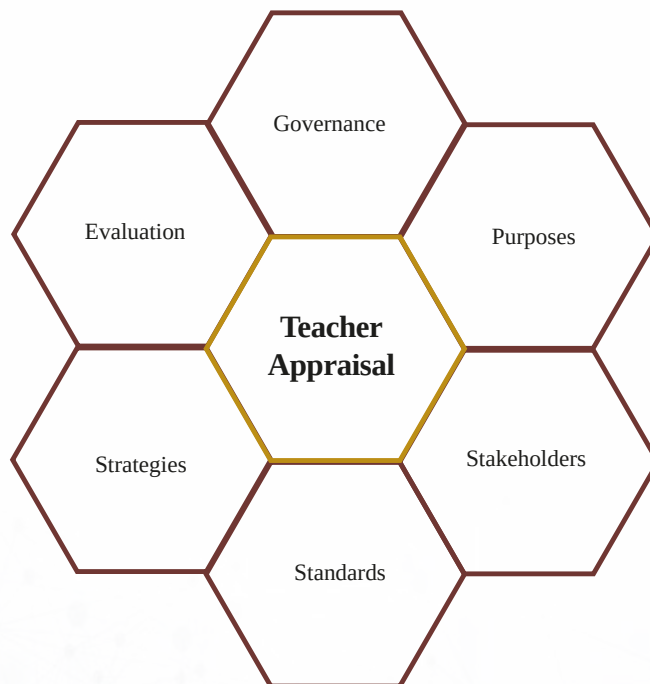


Figure 2: Designing in teacher appraisal systems

Key points related to each of these are summarised below.

### 3.1-Governance

Governance refers to the degree of centralization in teacher appraisal and where responsibility for it lies. At one extreme, teacher appraisal may be defined and regulated nationally (as, for example, in Korea). At the other, decisions about teacher appraisal will be made more locally by districts and schools (as, for example, in Estonia or Norway). Between these ends of the spectrum, national teacher appraisal requirements will exist, but how these are implemented is determined locally. This is the case, for example, in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. Resolving tensions between centralised uniformity and local autonomy is a key challenge in the design of effective teacher appraisal systems (Flores & Derrington, 2018). Key questions for policy makers in any particular context, then, are:

- Who will be responsible for the design, implementation, use and evaluation of teacher appraisal?
- To what extent will decisions about teacher appraisal be made at the local level of districts and schools?

### 3.2- Purposes

Two distinct purposes of teacher appraisal can be distinguished.

Firstly, it can be used summatively, to rate teacher quality, hold teachers accountable for their work, and inform decisions about job status or promotion. While summative teacher appraisal can be usefully linked to career progression, its high-stakes nature means it can be stressful for teachers and impact negatively on collegial relationships and school climate.

Second, when teacher appraisal is used formatively (see Gordon & McGhee, 2019), its primary purpose is teacher development. In such cases, the process is a constructive one through which feedback is provided on how teachers can improve together with appropriate developmental support. Used in this manner, teacher appraisal has the potential to enhance teacher quality.

The summative and formative uses of teacher appraisal are not exclusive and can co-exist. Tensions between them, though, can arise (Lillejord & Børte, 2019) and OECD (2013) recommends that ‘it is not advisable to design appraisal approaches that aim to fulfil the developmental function of teacher appraisal through a high-stakes accountability-oriented process’ (pp. 332-333).

Further key questions for policy makers, therefore, are:

- What purposes will teacher appraisal serve?
- How will its summative and formative potentials be realised?

### 3.3-Stakeholders

While teachers are the obvious targets of the teacher appraisal process, choices must still be made about a range of teacher-related issues, as Figure 3 shows.

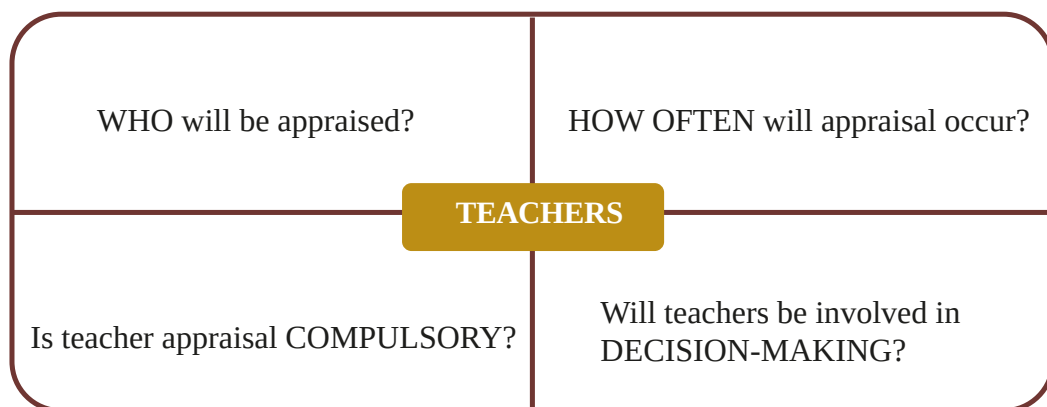


Figure 3: Teacher-related decisions in teacher appraisal

In relation to these points, it is desirable that all teachers take part in teacher appraisal. There may be certain categories of teacher appraisal (for example, for promotion) that are voluntary, but periodic engagement in the process should be seen as a requirement for all teachers (and not only for those who are seen to be under-performing). Teacher involvement in decision-making (for example, regarding appraisal criteria or processes) is also desirable so that teachers feel ownership of the process (Reddy et al., 2018) rather than seeing appraisal as something that is externally imposed.

Appraisers are also important participants. They are often figures of authority – such as Ministry officials or school principals – but may also include teacher colleagues, students and parents. It is essential to consider the kinds of preparation appraisers need in order to fulfil their role effectively, since the quality of teacher appraisal is affected by the competence of the evaluators.

Beyond teachers and appraisers, teacher appraisal may have implications for other stakeholders, such as teachers' associations or unions. These groups need to be considered in order to minimise resistance that can arise when new teacher appraisal systems are introduced without adequate consultation.

In relation to participants in teacher appraisal, then, there are several key questions for policy-makers to consider:

- Which teachers will undergo teacher appraisal, how often, and what decision-making input will they provide to the process?
- Who will the appraisers be and what support do they need in order to fulfil their roles effectively?
- Are there other stakeholders who should be consulted when a new teacher appraisal system is being set up?

### **3.4- Standards**

An effective teacher appraisal system will define the standards and criteria against which teachers are being evaluated. Standards (which stipulate what competences teachers are expected to possess) should reflect the multi-faceted nature of teacher competence and include not just performance in the classroom but additional issues such as teacher knowledge, reflective capacity, co-operation with colleagues, engagement in professional development, contributions to the school, and interactions with parents (where appropriate). Several examples of professional standards for teachers exist which illustrate this broad view of teacher competence. A recent framework (UNESCO/Education International, 2019, p. 6), for example, has three domains: teaching knowledge and understanding, teaching practice, and teaching relations; these are in turn broken down into 10 standards. These stipulate, for example, that teachers should know ‘how students learn and the particular learning, social and development needs of their students’ or that teachers should consistently demonstrate ‘planning and preparation to meet the learning objectives held for students’.

Regarding the role of standards in teacher appraisal, then, key questions for policy makers are:

- What are competent teachers expected to know and do?
- Have these competences been defined in professional standards for teachers?
- Is the teacher appraisal system linked to these standards?

### **3.5-Strategies**

Teacher appraisal is more effective when it is multi-dimensional – i.e. when it combines different strategies and input from various sources (Grissom & Youngs, 2016). Figure 4 lists a range of teacher appraisal strategies and conclusions about teacher competence should ideally be based on information collected over time from several of these. OECD (2018) argues that lesson observation should be a core teacher appraisal strategy given the direct evidence it provides of teaching.

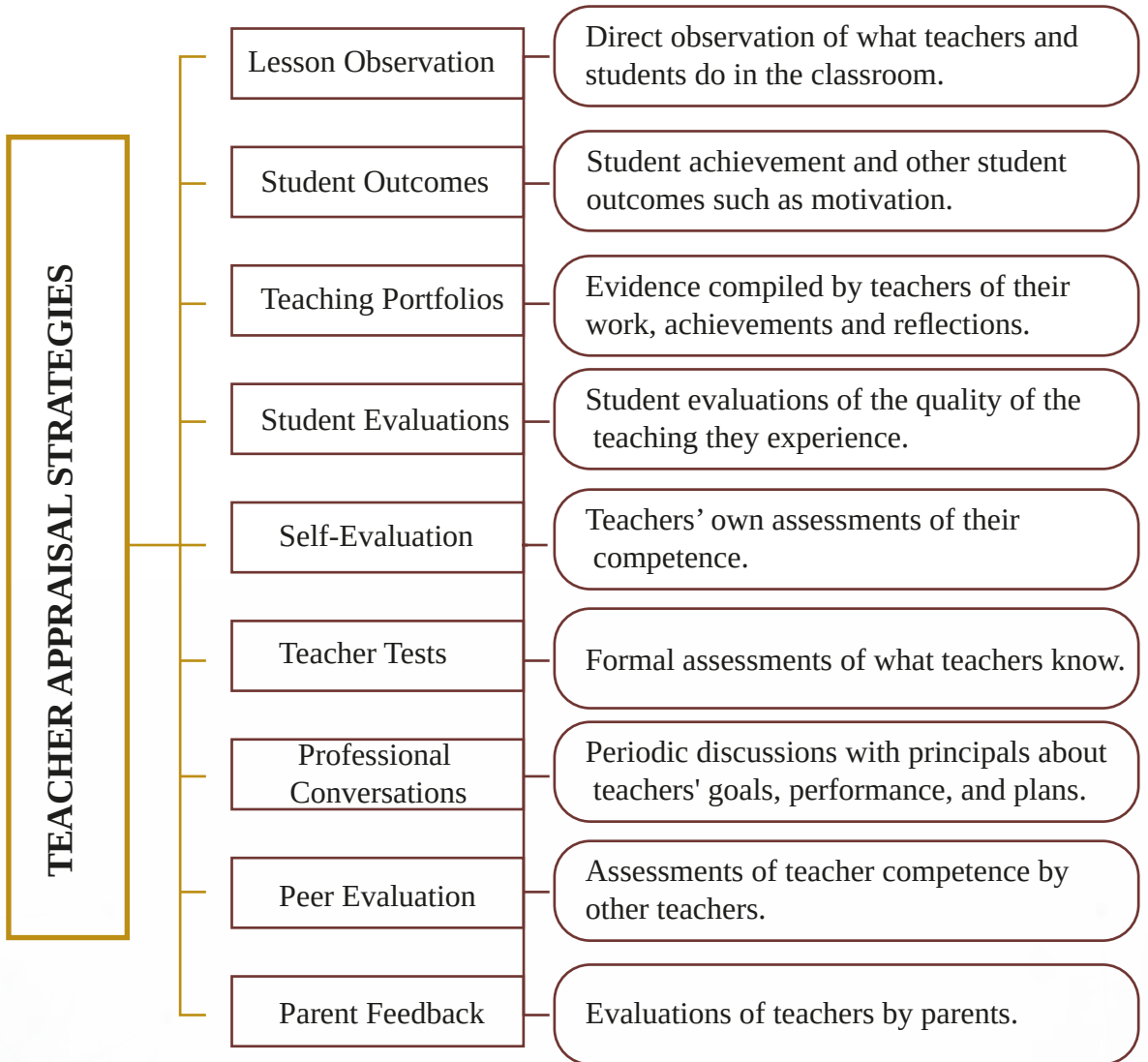


Figure 4: Teacher appraisal strategies

The advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these strategies should be considered when a teacher appraisal system is being designed. For example, while lesson observations provide insight into what teachers actually do, teachers find them stressful and (particularly when observations occur only once or twice a year) may teach in a manner that is not typical. Student and parent evaluations are also used for teacher appraisal and while this gives these stakeholders a role in the appraisal process, it is important that they are asked questions they have the competence to give informed answers to. Self-evaluation also gives teachers a role in the appraisal process but, particularly in high-stakes contexts, can



lead to inflated teacher self-ratings of their own competence. The use of student achievement as a measure of teacher competence has been widely debated in the literature (Amrein-Beardsley & Holloway, 2019). Overall, while student outcomes are seen to be a central element in teacher appraisal, the use of value-added models which seek causal links between teaching and learning have been widely criticised. Student outcomes, then, should be seen as one of several sources of information that can inform judgements about teacher quality.

Overall, across different teacher appraisal strategies, it is essential that high quality instruments are used, such as observation tools, student evaluation forms and teaching portfolio protocols. Particularly in relation to lesson observation, several instruments are available (see Bell, Dobbelaer, Klette, & Visscher, 2019 for a comparative analysis ). In addition to the importance of high-quality tools, it is also vital that appraisers are given the support they need to utilise different teacher appraisal strategies effectively. Where feasible, the opportunities for using technology in teacher appraisal should also be considered; for example, platforms such as IRIS Connect (IRIS Connect, 2019) and Video-Enhanced Observation (VEO, 2019) allow lessons to be observed remotely and for recordings of lessons to be shared with multiple appraisers in different locations.

Key questions for policy-makers when teacher appraisal strategies are being chosen are the following:

- Which (range of) teacher appraisal strategies will be used?
- Has the feasibility of these strategies been assessed?
- What challenges or resistance might the implementation of these strategies create? How might these be mitigated?
- Have high-quality tools to support these strategies been developed or obtained?
- What support will appraisers need to implement the chosen teacher appraisal strategies effectively and how will this support be provided?

### ***3.6-Evaluation***

A final dimension of a teacher appraisal system to consider is how it will be evaluated. Without systematic evaluation processes, it is not possible to ascertain whether a teacher appraisal system is functioning as intended. Evidence from a range of sources should be included in the evaluation of teacher appraisal, as indicated in Figure 5.

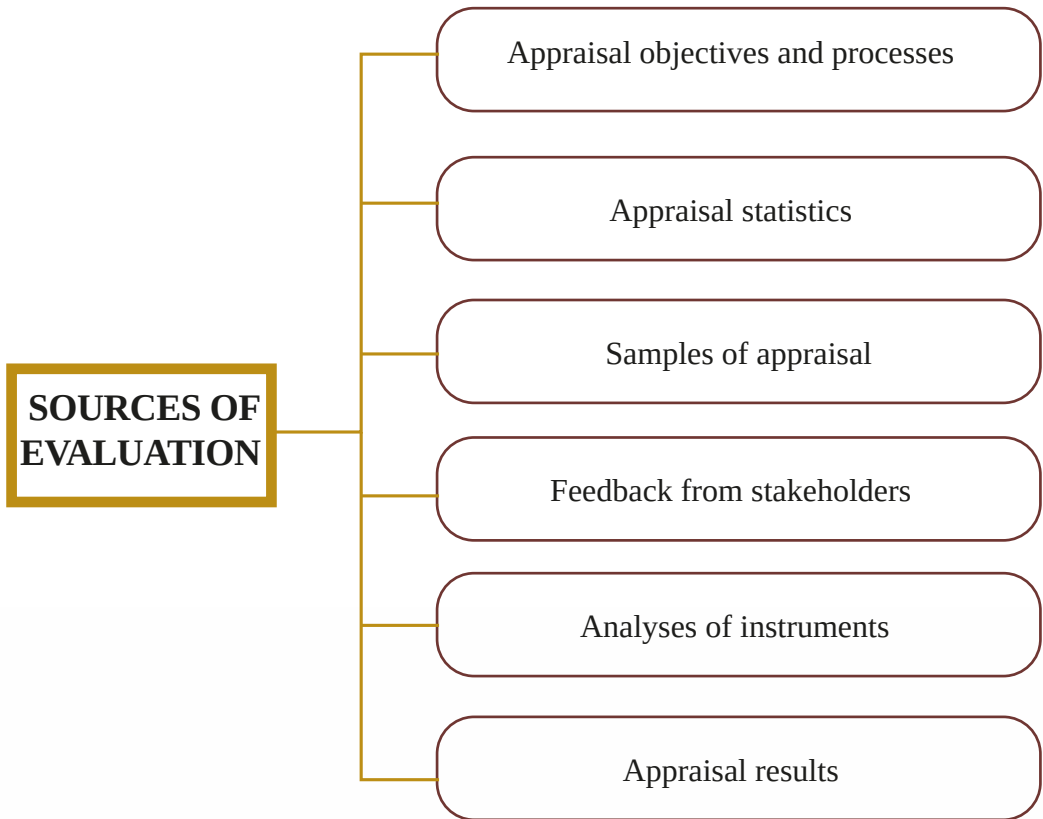


Figure 5: Evaluating a teacher appraisal system

There are two broad kinds of information here that can inform the evaluation of a teacher evaluation system. The first is more objective in nature and consists of documents that stipulate appraisal objectives and processes, actual appraisal tools and protocols, examples of completed appraisals, and statistics regarding the numbers of teachers appraised and the results of the process. The second kind of information is more subjective and draws on stakeholder perceptions of the process, particularly those of teachers and appraisers. Understanding how participants in teacher appraisal view the process has been an important feature of recent research, with attention to both principals (for example, Lavigne & Olson, 2019) and teachers (for example, Robinson, 2019). Stakeholder analyses of this kind provide insights that can make a valuable contribution to the evaluation of teacher appraisal systems.

Despite the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of teacher appraisal, it is an issue that is often neglected, as noted in a recent report about teaching in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018).

Key questions for policy makers in relation to this theme, then, are:

- How will the effectiveness of teacher appraisal be evaluated?
- Who will be responsible for the evaluation process?
- How will the results of the evaluation be shared with stakeholders?
- Who will be responsible for implementing any action points that emerge from the evaluation?

## 4-Recommendations

Figure 6 summarises 19 recommendations for effective appraisal systems (see Borg, 2019 for a fuller discussion of these).

<b>SITUATION ANALYSIS</b>	The introduction of a new approach to teacher appraisal should be informed by a sound understanding of the current approach to, capacity for and attitudes towards teacher appraisal.
<b>SYSTEMS APPROACH</b>	A whole-systems approach, through which different components of the educational system are aligned and consistent with core underlying principles, is a key element in making teacher appraisal work.
<b>CLEAR RATIONALE</b>	It is important that a teacher appraisal system be underpinned by a clear rationale for why teacher appraisal is important and what principles will guide its use.
<b>TEACHER COMPETENCE</b>	Teacher competence is multi-dimensional and the focus of teacher appraisal should derive from and be consistent with a clearly articulated view of teacher quality.
<b>KEY PARAMETERS</b>	A teacher appraisal system should clearly define basic parameters regarding whether appraisal is compulsory or voluntary, who will be evaluated, when and how often, by whom, how, and how appraisal outcomes will be used.
<b>STANDARDS AND CRITERIA</b>	Effective teacher appraisal is not possible unless the standards and criteria against which teachers will be assessed have been clearly defined. Appraisal standards and criteria should be grounded in a clear conception of teacher quality.
<b>PURPOSES</b>	Teacher appraisal can fulfil important summative and formative purposes but the processes through which each is addressed need to be differentiated.
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	An effective teacher appraisal system will support teacher development. Teacher appraisal that does not foster improved teaching will not enhance student outcomes.

<b>DIFFERENTIATION</b>	A teacher appraisal system should distinguish between more and less effective teachers. If it does not, it cannot fulfil its potential to contribute to educational improvement.
<b>STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT</b>	Scope for the meaningful involvement of all stakeholders in teacher appraisal should be considered at different stages of the process.
<b>INSTRUMENTS</b>	The instruments which are employed during teacher appraisal need to be designed in a manner that is contextually appropriate and technically competent.
<b>TRAINING</b>	Training needs to be provided for everyone involved in the teacher appraisal process, including those who are responsible for interpreting results.
<b>FEASIBILITY</b>	Teacher appraisal systems should be designed in a manner that is feasible given the time, human resources, infrastructure and funding available.
<b>SCHOOL CLIMATE</b>	To maximise the potential of teacher appraisal to enhance professional cultures and collegial relationships, the risks posed by teacher appraisal to school climate should be anticipated.
<b>RESISTANCE</b>	It is important to understand and consider ways of minimising potential sources of resistance to teacher appraisal. Effective communication and consultation at the design stage of a new teacher appraisal system can reduce resistance.
<b>STUDENT OUTCOMES</b>	Teacher appraisal should be driven by a desire to improve student outcomes. Learning is a core student outcome, but other such as attitudes to learning and motivation should also be considered when teacher quality is being assessed.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Key information relevant to the teacher appraisal process should be made available to stakeholders. Communications will be more effective when information is accessible and user-friendly.
<b>EVALUATION</b>	Teacher appraisal systems should include provision for regular evaluation in order to determine whether the appraisal system is meeting its goals. Input from a range of stakeholders, in addition to the analysis of the appraisal process and its results, should contribute to the evaluation.

Figure 6: Recommendations for effective teacher appraisal systems

The above recommendations are informed by a detailed analysis of the contemporary international literature and are also consistent with the following definition of effective teacher appraisal:

a multidimensional but coherent process which acknowledges the complexity of teaching, is grounded in sound standards, employs a range of good quality measures, utilises input from a range of appropriately prepared stakeholders (including teachers themselves), has discriminatory power<sup>1</sup>, facilitates fair decisions, gives teachers at various points of their careers appropriate levels of support, and contributes to teacher professional development, career advancement, positive school cultures and improved student outcomes (Borg, 2019, p.2).

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<sup>1</sup>-Discriminatory power' refers to the manner in which effective teacher appraisal differentiates between different levels of teacher competence.

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