

## Executive summary

Universal access has been reached in primary education. In addition, access to pre-primary education is good for children aged 4 and 5, with coverage rates considerably above the average for the Latin America region. However, the completion rates of lower and upper secondary education remain unsatisfactory and have increased slowly over the past decades compared to other countries of the region. Uruguay has also very high repetition rates in regional and international comparison, leading to a high number of overage students. Furthermore, levels of student achievement in international assessments have decreased but remain above the regional average. A major concern is the significant proportion of students underperforming in secondary education.

The recognition of equity challenges in education has led Uruguay to invest considerably in targeted programmes aimed at improving equity in education. However, there remain marked educational inequities based on students' socio-economic status. Uruguay had the fifth strongest association between socio-economic status and student performance among all PISA 2012 participating countries. There are large differences in students' achievement, depending on school type, school location and school resources. These inequities are reflected in students' educational attainment. In 2010, only 25% of 15-17 year-olds from the lowest income quintile had completed lower secondary education and 7% of 18-20 year-olds had completed upper secondary education, compared to 85% and 57% from the top income quintile respectively.

The following policy priorities were identified to improve the effectiveness of resource use in the Uruguayan school system.

### **Rethink the governance of school education to facilitate reform implementation and improve the use of school resources**

A major challenge in education in Uruguay concerns its institutional governance structure and the distribution of responsibilities to develop and implement school education policy. There is no clarity regarding who is responsible for defining education policy and who is ultimately held accountable for policy implementation and learning outcomes within the education system. This results from the ambiguity of roles between the National Public Education Administration (ANEP)'s Central Governing Council (CODICEN) and its sectorial education councils. Lines of responsibility are unclear, there is a lack of leadership of the school system as a whole, and competition between education councils for resources. Also, the governance structure is highly fragmented as, in practice, each education council operates its subsystem in a rather independent manner. Only small and incremental change is feasible under the current governance arrangements. Education governance is also overly centralised in Uruguay leaving very little autonomy to both schools and departments. Another major feature of the governance of school education in

Uruguay is the institutionalised co-administration with teachers which raises concerns as, inevitably, they do have vested interests.

As a result, there is a need to clarify responsibilities in the school education sector. A first step is to concentrate ultimate responsibility and accountability in a single body which would lead the development of school education policy. The most natural such body in Uruguay is the CODICEN, which should have its responsibilities reinforced *vis-à-vis* the individual education councils. The objective is to define the entity to be held accountable for the state of education in Uruguay; reduce unnecessary duplication; provide the potential for better co-ordination across education levels and types; establish closer linkages between funding, resource allocation and accountability; facilitate the alignment between education strategic objectives and school-level management; and assist with medium- and long-term planning in education. Another priority is to review the pertinence of the institutionalised co-administration with teachers. An education system should be student-centred and the risk of the co-administration with teachers is that, instead, it becomes teacher-centred. Moreover, Uruguay could explore ways to gradually provide more autonomy to schools and lower levels of government (departments) in order to enable them to foster improvements in education. Certain decisions are best left to local authorities and school principals, who best know their schools' needs, to ensure a more optimal allocation of resources.

### **Increase overall public spending on education, while addressing key inefficiencies**

The public funding of education has increased significantly in recent years. In real terms, public spending on education grew at an average annual rate of 10% between 2004 and 2013. This reflects the growing importance of education as an area of public investment and a clear commitment of national authorities to improve resourcing in education. However, in spite of the recent efforts, public expenditure on education remains considerably below the OECD average and below the equivalent expenditure in other Latin American countries. Also, while the multiannual budget process allows medium-term planning the budget preparation is not strategic.

The Uruguayan government should continue efforts to increase the amount spent on education in real terms and as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) as can be afforded, given general economic conditions and government fiscal policy. Priorities for increased funding include the extension of learning time in primary education, the expansion of secondary education, growth in early childhood and pre-primary education and the increase of teacher and school leader salaries. Given the constraints on increasing education public expenditure, it is all the more vital to secure efficiencies within the existing budget. These could entail decreasing drop-out rates in secondary education, reducing repetition rates, addressing the existence of many small schools, enhancing the allocation of teachers to schools and improving completion rates in initial teacher education. Moreover, there is a need to develop a strategic approach to budget planning. An education strategy which informs budget planning needs clear objectives, established targets to be achieved, an indicators framework, and clear structures for reporting on progress and performance.

### **Improve the transparency of school funding mechanisms and the monitoring of the use of public resources**

The distribution of resources across schools lacks transparency. While each education council seems to have an established algorithm to distribute public resources to individual

schools, the parameters defining the basis for the distribution are not made public. In addition, the extra staff allocated to individual schools depends on the subjective advice of inspectors. The lack of transparency extends to the fact that there is no public information available on the education resources allocated to each school. Challenges also arise in monitoring the use of financial resources: the analysis of the impact of financial resources on educational achievement is not common; auditing procedures are not given enough resources; there is no reporting on the use of budgets at the school level; and there is a general lack of cost-benefit analyses of different educational policies and programmes.

In order to bring greater transparency to the distribution of public resources to schools, the introduction of a funding formula is recommended. The distribution through a formula is more likely to lead to a more efficient and equitable allocation than other methods, including discretionary and incremental funding models. A per student funding scheme implies that resources are calculated per each student and that a specific formulation is drawn. In Uruguay, at least two separate funding formulas could be developed, one for determining staff resources for each school (teachers and support staff) and another for determining the operational budget for each school. The formulas to be introduced should take into account the socio-economic context of schools. Also, there is a need to strengthen the monitoring of the use of public resources in school education. The monitoring system should more broadly consist of a periodical assessment of the state of education in Uruguay, be based on a framework of education indicators, include the in-depth analysis of the data collected, and involve the evaluation of specific education policies and educational programmes. Furthermore, Uruguay needs to improve dissemination of information about activities at the school level, including information on school budgets.

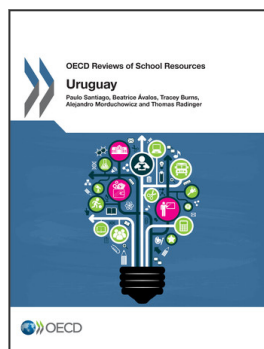
### **Strengthen the professionalism of teachers**

In spite of the recent efforts by the Uruguayan government to increase the status of teaching through higher teacher salaries, a number of factors limit the professionalism of teachers. The Uruguayan education system lacks a national framework of teacher competencies. Initial teacher education is faced with considerable challenges such as very low completion rates. The conception of teacher employment in Uruguay, whereby basic compensation is associated essentially to the teacher's teaching load, is also a source of concern as it does not provide recognition to activities other than teaching. Teacher recruitment and deployment are highly inefficient while teacher compensation is unstructured. Teacher appraisal, while established, is limited in its ability to provide teachers with useful feedback for their development. Moreover, participation in professional developments seems to be low. As a result, there is a need to strengthen the professionalism of teachers. This should involve developing a competency framework for the teaching profession, reconceptualising teacher employment to account for all activities performed by teachers, creating a career structure for teachers associated with a teacher certification process, rethinking the system for the recruitment and deployment of teachers, improving the provision and status of initial teacher education, strengthening school-based teacher appraisal for formative purposes and strengthening the provision of professional development.

### **Conceive school evaluation and school leadership to foster the continuous improvement in schools**

Considering the high level of centralisation of decision-making in Uruguay, the school inspections constitute a crucial link between the councils at the central level and schools

and principals across the country. However, the Uruguayan model of school inspection is limited in the extent to which it supports school development. Inspectors tend to focus more on control and compliance and evaluations are at an individual level rather than covering the school as a whole. A priority for policy development is therefore strengthening the capacity of the school inspection to contribute to school improvement. In the long-run, Uruguay should consider the introduction of a comprehensive school evaluation process. School evaluation will need to contribute towards school improvement and not simply be an exercise in compliancy. There is also a need to encourage and support schools to develop school development planning and self-evaluation processes. A possible approach lies in establishing requirements for schools that promote strategic planning. Furthermore, while school leaders benefit from an established employment framework their potential for pedagogical leadership is not sufficiently recognised. As part of its school leadership development strategy, Uruguay should consolidate a competency framework for school leaders; re-evaluate current levels of remuneration; improve the quality of school leader preparation; provide greater opportunities for professional development and broaden the criteria for the selection of school leaders.



From:

## OECD Reviews of School Resources: Uruguay 2016

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264265530-en>

### Please cite this chapter as:

Santiago, Paulo, *et al.* (2016), “Executive summary”, in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Uruguay 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264265530-3-en>

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