

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**FAIR AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**  
**Trondheim, Norway, 4-5 June 2007**  
**ISSUES PAPER – SESSION B**

*The session will discuss how differentiation mechanisms (academic selection/school choice) impact on equity and how attractive secondary education structures and pathways can contribute to more equitable opportunities. It will highlight the need to remove dead ends and provide second chances.*

Our conclusions and recommendations are:

***Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection***

*Evidence*

- Secondary school systems with large social differences between schools tend on average to have worse results in mathematics and reading and a greater spread of reading outcomes. Social background is more of an obstacle to educational success than in systems where there are not large socio-economic differences between schools.
- Academic selection by school systems is associated with great social differences between schools and a stronger effect of socio-economic status on performance, but also with a stronger performance at the top end of the scale in mathematics and science.
- Evidence on secondary students from PISA (OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) compared to evidence at primary level from PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and evidence from countries which have introduced comprehensive schooling suggest that early tracking is associated with reduced equity in outcomes and sometimes weakens results overall.

*Policy recommendations*

- Early tracking and streaming need to be justified in terms of proven benefits as they very often pose risks to equity.
- School systems using early tracking should consider raising the age of first tracking to reduce inequities and improve outcomes.
- Academic selection needs to be used with caution since it too poses risks to equity.

***Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity***

*Evidence*

- School choice may pose risks to equity since well-educated parents may make shrewder choices. Better-off parents have the resources to exploit choice, and academic selection tends to accelerate the progress of those who have already gained the best start in life from their parents.
- Across countries, greater choice in school systems is associated with larger differences in the social composition of different schools.

### *Policy recommendations*

- School choice poses risks to equity and requires careful management, in particular to ensure that it does not result in increased differences in the social composition of different schools.
- Given school choice, oversubscribed schools need ways to ensure an even social mix in schools – for example selection methods such as lottery arrangements. Financial premiums to schools attracting disadvantaged pupils may also help.

### ***In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent drop out***

#### *Evidence*

- Between 5% and 40% of students drop out of school in OECD countries (measured by the proportion of 20-to-24-year-olds not in education and without upper secondary education). They go on to have low skills and suffer high rates of unemployment.
- Among other factors, dropout stems from disenchantment with school, lack of support at home, negative learning experiences and repeating years.
- Early identification of students at risk helps to improve outcomes and prevent dropout.
- Good career guidance and counselling combined with a more flexible and diverse (and therefore attractive) curriculum help to reduce dropout rates.

#### *Policy recommendations*

- Early prevention of dropout is the best cure. Basic schooling should support and engage those who struggle at school as well as those who excel.
- Monitoring of those at risk (using information on attendance, performance and involvement in school activities) should be linked to interventions to improve outcomes and prevent dropout.
- Upper secondary education needs to be attractive not just to an academically inclined elite, offering good quality pathways without dead ends and effective links to the world of work.
- Smooth transitions prevent school failure and dropout. Additional learning support at the end of secondary school may help to encourage students to stay in school.
- Good quality vocational tracks are essential. Removing an academic hurdle from entrance to general upper secondary education, as Sweden and Norway have done can increase the status of the vocational track.

### ***Offer second chances to gain from education***

#### *Evidence*

- Those who fail at school often find it difficult to recover later on. In all OECD countries, those with weak basic qualifications are much less likely to continue learning in adult life (see Figure 2.9). Significantly, this figure also shows that there are big differences between countries.
- Across OECD countries, many adults and young dropouts without basic education obtain school qualifications through second chance programmes. In the United States, almost 60% of dropouts eventually earn a high school credential (GED certificate).

#### *Policy recommendations*

- Second chances are necessary for those who lack basic education and skills. These include programmes that provide literacy training, primary and secondary education, work-based programmes and arrangements to recognise informal learning.

*Points for discussion:*

- 1) What is the impact of school choice on equity in education? What can be done to make schools choice consistent with equity?*
- 2) What measures are effective in encouraging young people to complete at least upper secondary education? How can the structure of the education system be more conducive to that end?*