



Informal Meeting of OECD Ministers of Education

Oslo, 9 and 10 June 2009

Improving Equity in Education

Welcome by Aart de Geus, OECD Deputy Secretary-General (speaking points)

1. Equity is central to the OECD's mission to promote a stronger, cleaner and fairer economy.

- The current financial and economic crisis adds greater urgency to our meeting here today. The OECD's projections are sobering. We are already seeing economic output collapsing around us in 2009 and expected to stagnate in 2010. We expect world trade to plunge by around 13% in 2009 and only pick up again slightly in 2010. Most strikingly, this recession is the most highly synchronised among OECD countries in post-war history.
- Unemployment, which was already at 6% in 2008, will rise to 8 ½ % in 2009 and almost 10% in 2010. So in all of our countries, we are facing higher unemployment, with more families in distress and the very real risk that the economic crisis will turn into a social crisis. We must act, act decisively and act now

2. Education is part of the solution – yet education budgets are under pressure.

- Despite the crisis, investment in education must be maintained to deliver the human capital and creativity needed for the innovation-driven “green growth” we seek.
- Education is the key to building a fair and inclusive future where every child has the opportunity to reach his or her highest potential.

3. Each child's failure costs society in three ways

- Failing at school penalises the child – in terms of personal development, health and economic success – very often for their whole lifetime. It also costs society by:
 - i. Limiting our capacity to grow our economies and to innovate.
 - ii. Damaging social cohesion.
 - iii. Impacting on our public budgets as we pay to offset the damage done.

Concluding remarks

- This meeting is an opportunity for us to discuss together in a free and frank manner, behind closed doors, what to do about improving equity in education and how to do it
- Our report *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education* clearly outlined the main options for action. Yet we all know that there is still a long way to go before these policy recommendations are fully implemented and can benefit those for whom they are designed. So we are going to do three things:
 - First, we will support OECD countries' efforts to work towards getting better policies in place with our new project on "[Assessing progress in improving equity in education](#)" which aims to provide countries with better knowledge of what works, what doesn't and how to achieve real improvements.
 - Second, equity issues will occupy a centre stage within the online collaborative platform we are currently designing to help education ministries cope with the crisis. This is called "[educationtoday: OECD's education lighthouse for the way out of the crisis](#)". It will be launched later this month at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM, 24-25 June 2009). It is designed to allow countries to exchange information on the impact of the economic and financial crisis on the education sector and their policy responses to these challenges.
 - Third, we will listen carefully to the discussions here today to **identify your common concerns and top priorities for policy relevant information and data**. It is your prerogative to tell us what you most need to know in order to improve equity in education. It is our job to provide that information and support to ensure you achieve your goals.

Thank you.