

## **OECD/CERI ‘SCHOOLING FOR TOMORROW’ THE FRAMEWORK FOR COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT IN PHASE 3**

1. The *Schooling for Tomorrow* programme (SfT) is an international project located in CERI (the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) at OECD, developing futures thinking in education. Its starting point is the need to develop and share approaches to overcome the preoccupation with the short term that typifies so much decision-making in education. It is concerned with schooling in a broad sense. This covers what takes place in the institutions formally named “schools” but it is equally concerned with the learning and experiences that go on in other ways and places, relating to young people up to approximately 18 years-old. The programme is contributing to the understanding of lifelong learning as a broader defining CERI theme and is co-ordinated with parallel OECD futures work.

2. *Schooling for Tomorrow* has been running for a number of years, and is now entering its third phase. Phase One concentrated on laying the initial analytical and methodological ground, developing a set of school scenarios and undertaking parallel analysis of networks and ICT.<sup>1</sup> Phase Two continued the analytical development but focused especially on the operational side and engaged in close collaboration with a small number of ‘inner-core’ systems.<sup>2</sup> That collaboration explored the potential for futures thinking to inform concrete challenges for educational leadership and policy-making.<sup>3</sup> We are now entering an ambitious new phase, widening the international participation in the project, systematising the knowledge base, and disseminating the results of futures thinking in action. This note presents why and how systems can join this important international programme.

### **Why Futures Thinking for Leadership and Policy?**

3. Why engage in futures thinking? A big part of the answer lies in a major tension that becomes increasingly apparent in education. The tension is between, on the one hand, a world that is increasingly complex and uncertain, with a growing number of stakeholders in schooling. On the other hand, so much of education still is determined by short-term thinking – preoccupation with pressing immediate problems or simply seeking more efficient ways of maintaining established practice. Neglect of the long term is increasingly problematic in meeting the challenges of complexity and change.

4. Futures Thinking introduces into these equations the longer-term perspectives with which to look beyond the straitjackets of immediate constraints. It stimulates reflection on the major changes taking place in education and its wider environment. It provides tools for clarifying the desirable futures that we wish to

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<sup>1</sup> This resulted in a series of publications: *Networks of Innovation: towards new models for managing schools and systems*, 2003; *What Schools for the Future?*, 2001; *Learning to Change: ICT in Schools*, 2001; *Learning to Bridge the Digital Divide*, 2000; *Innovating Schools*, 1999. The Rotterdam conference was the event at the heart of this phase in November 2000.

<sup>2</sup> England, Netherlands, New Zealand, and Ontario, Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Phase Two was marked by two international conferences (the *Schooling for Tomorrow Forums*): in Poitiers in February 2003 and in Toronto, June 2004. A series of reports is being published as outcomes from this phase – on futures thinking in theory and practice, on demand for schooling, and on personalisation of learning.

realise and the options for doing so, and the undesirable futures we wish to avoid. As well as clarifying values and options, it can also enhance dialogue about the ways ahead, including dialogue among those who might normally not “sit at the same table”.

### **The Benefits of Participation in *Schooling for Tomorrow***

5. The gains from such approaches are to be had by those at every level in the education system – for those designing or advising on policy reform, those identifying strategic directions for “meso”- level organisations that broker the connections between the centre and the grassroots, to local-level leadership. In the light of these benefits of futures thinking in general, there are compelling reasons for joining this particular international programme:

First, it means to *build strategic capacity for decision-making* among those systems and stakeholders taking part. Building “strategic capacity” requires focus and sustainability which this international programme encourages.

Second, with country-based engagement in SfT being through initiatives and issues that are already on each country’s agenda, participation in this project *broadens the options and thinking by making available international expertise* - from OECD and parallel projects in other countries.

Third, the requirement to report and make visible aims, processes and effectiveness provides further incentive for the selected initiatives to be *reflective and informed by evidence*. This should give them additional weight in their own country.

Fourth, participation means to take an *active part in an important international enterprise*, and this too may prove invaluable in lending *additional weight and motivation* to the country-based initiative.

### **Joining and Participating in *Schooling for Tomorrow***

6. Participating in *Schooling for Tomorrow* means:

To identify an initiative(s) with a strong futures component, that is directly relevant to educational innovation and change in the participating system. We term these “educational futures thinking in action” initiatives (outlined in more detail below).

Belonging to this international project is explicitly recognised as an integral feature of the initiative.

The participating initiative makes detailed information about itself available to SfT through reporting and evaluation to a consistent framework, as outlined in this note.

7. The term “initiative” is here used broadly to cover a variety of projects in terms of scale, aims, and where they fit into any system. What they share as initiatives is that they are a coherent set of activities aimed to reach certain outcomes. (They are thus not “initiatives” narrowly defined to mean government schemes to resolve a specific problem.) They might cover a range of aims - creating channels of dialogue and reflection to promote innovation and change; building vision, leadership and innovation capacity; or enhancing strategic policy formulation and implementation, (or a mix of these). They may be broadly focused, such as on the future of a sector, or more specifically defined in terms of a particular issue or target population (or both). They may be at different levels of the educational system - national, regional or local – and may range from national programmes to relatively small-scale experimental projects.

8. Countries (including other jurisdictions and entities) joining *Schooling for Tomorrow* may do so through entirely new initiatives, or else adapt existing ones that meet the criteria below, for which joining

SfT adds a valuable international dimension. The framework for reporting is flexible, and can accommodate “futures thinking in action” initiatives which are at different stages.

9. Many of them will be primarily run by the educational authorities or related agencies, but we are keen to broaden the range of stakeholders contributing to SfT and so would not restrict membership only to these. Thus far, participating initiatives have been in OECD member countries but our aim of broadening participation also means that we would like to explore co-operation with non-members in order to include a wider range of contexts.

### ***Criteria defining “Educational Futures Thinking in Action” Initiatives***

10. Having stressed that a wide variety of initiatives are allowed within the framework of *Schooling for Tomorrow*, there are criteria to be fulfilled to be an example of “educational futures thinking in action”:

- *Futures thinking*: means that the initiative:
  - Adopts a deliberate futures-oriented methodology as an essential aspect of realising its aims<sup>4</sup>. This means it is not simply part of administering the school system or formulating on-going reforms.
  - Incorporates time-horizons that are long term by the conventional standards of educational decision-making - at least a 10-year time horizon and possibly much further into the future.
- *Educational*: means that the initiative in question:
  - Informs decision-making in learning and education, whether within or outside the formal school system.
  - Includes participation by educational authorities, leaders and educators, other educational stakeholders, or those not strictly within education but with a direct interest in it.
- *In action*: this means the initiative:
  - Addresses educational reform or builds strategic capacity or futures-oriented dialogue and so contributes to innovation and change rather than be a purely academic exercise.

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<sup>4</sup> Again, these may cover a variety of approaches - quantitative and/or qualitative, normative and/or exploratory - using different futures methods. These may include “horizon scanning” (looking across an area to identify future challenges and opportunities), “trends and mega-trends analysis” (developing existing trends and their implications into the future), or “scenario analysis” (creating and using internally consistent images of the future).

### Criteria for Schooling for Tomorrow Initiatives

An initiative fits the Schooling for Tomorrow criteria if it:

- Adopts a futures-oriented methodology, with a time horizon of at least 10 years into the future
- Addresses educational change and innovation...
- ...through informing strategy, building capacity or promoting dialogue
- Incorporates stakeholders with a clear interest in education
- Addresses priority issues for the stakeholders involved

### *The “Terms of Engagement”*

11. The significant expansion of the number of participating countries, plus the more intensive task for the OECD Secretariat in building the international knowledge base, calls for new roles and responsibilities in Phase Three.

12. The *OECD team* will continue to generate futures R&D, facilitate international exchange, and record and process information on futures thinking. Specifically this will mean to:

- Provide the frameworks to inform participation and guide recording and reporting of futures thinking in action.
- Supply analytical and methodological tools generated by OECD to stimulate the national capacity for futures thinking.
- Participate directly in country-based meetings/events in the country once/twice per year (depending on distances involved), through the OECD Secretariat and possibly other experts from the project.
- Process and analyse information on the outcomes from each country’s participating initiative[s], and to bring these together from the international vantage point.
- Give access to parallel initiatives in other countries, including through international seminars organised by OECD and by networks of countries which choose to work together on a thematic or regional basis.

13. Each participating country will:

- Come to an agreed statement from the outset on the nature of the engagement with *Schooling for Tomorrow*, identifying a particular initiative(s) and showing how it intends to apply futures thinking to address particular issues on their innovation and reform agendas.
- Agree to apply the recording frameworks and requirements (see next section), and to make the results available to the project throughout the period of co-operation.

- Appoint a named contact as liaison person between the initiative and the Secretariat.
- Appoint a study team or individual expert who, over and above any steering group for the initiative itself, will report on background, aims, design, procedure, outcomes, and review.
- Undertake to participate in the *Schooling for Tomorrow* seminars and conferences to share experiences and expertise.

14. These commitments imply that sufficient dedicated resources are made available in the country for them to be fulfilled. Over and above the initiative itself, there are financial commitments needed to enable the work of the study team/expert and the active participation in international OECD events. At the same time, by building on initiatives addressing on-going reform and innovation priorities within the country, this is expected to involve the channelling of existing resources, rather than necessarily the generation of new ones.

15. Participation by the country will normally also involve a financial contribution to the OECD to cover the international overheads. This annual contribution to OECD is foreseen to be in the range of 12 000 to 20 000 EUR for each country/state.

## THE FRAMEWORK FOR REPORTING

16. Crucial in Phase Three is the building of the Schooling for Tomorrow Knowledge Base, which will give a systematic overview of international experiences with futures thinking in action. Such a knowledge base will inform countries on the ways to engage in future thinking and on the effectiveness of different approaches to doing so in different contexts. In this Phase, we want to ensure that all participating systems are recording information as the initiative unfolds rather than waiting until the end, thereby simplifying the reporting process and making the information more reliable.

17. The systematic reporting on futures thinking initiatives, including effectiveness and impact, is fundamental. At least three conditions will need to be met for the knowledge base to be successful.

- Most basically, all participating initiatives are *committed to providing this information* so that the knowledge base can be constructed and be truly international. This information will go into the public domain.
- Each initiative provides information about their *aims, design, and activities* according to the agreed reporting framework. In this way the information will be comparable and of use to the other SFT country-based initiatives and to a broader educational public. Each will show how its aims are to be achieved by the tools, activities, and instruments they report. It is also recognised that, with learning from experience and new external challenges, the design may change over the course of the project - it is important that this is reported, too.
- Third, all initiatives will seek to report on the more complex *outputs, results and outcomes*. This covers the tangible outputs (reports, materials etc.) but crucially the less tangible outcomes such as participant evaluations of events, and evidence on how well the initiative has achieved its aims and its wider benefits and spin-offs. It is recognised how challenging it is to identify results, and isolating the unique effect of futures initiatives may be impossible. But, progress in addressing effectiveness is essential to provide evidence for future thinking in action and where possible appropriate measures should be created in the design stages.

18. Based on a standard two-year engagement in SFT, the participating countries are expected to prepare three reports, each of five to ten pages. At the start on joining the project, an *initial report* should be made. This would be followed by an *intermediate report* after one year and a *final report* after two years. Countries that wish to participate on a one-year basis (or are not sure whether they opt for a one-year or two-year engagement) can combine their intermediate report and final report at the end of their project period (i.e. they would report only twice). The Secretariat will undertake timely notification of reporting deadlines.

19. The burden of reporting has been kept deliberately limited but if there is any extra information available (e.g. policy documents, particular instruments and tools developed, video clips), we would also wish to receive this as it becomes available, preferably in the form of web links.

### Reporting Schooling for Tomorrow Initiatives

- 1. Start of project: Initial report (5 - 10 pages)
- 2. End of Year One: Intermediate report (5 - 10 pages)
- 3. End of Year Two: Final report (5 - 10 pages)

NB. This assumes a standard 2-year participation, but in practice engagement in SfT may be shorter or longer

## 1. The Initial Report

20. The initial report sets out the context in which the futures initiative is developed, the aims of the initiative and the design and methodology through which these aims are to be achieved. Reporting on these issues at the outset improves the evaluation of effectiveness in later stages. It will also help the Secretariat to compare and possibly cluster the projects that have most in common and facilitates communication within those clusters. Finally, it makes it possible to report internationally from an early stage on the range of initiatives, their aims, designs and methodologies in SfT.

21. Engaging in something as complex as “futures thinking in action” means that the design phase will not end after the initial report. Through the process of learning from experience and facing unforeseen challenges the design is expected to change along the way. The design of tools and instruments and even the further refinement of aims are expected to continue until well in the first year of the project and possibly beyond. There will be room in the intermediate and final reports to describe these developments.

22. The following questions provide the structure of the initial report for all participating initiatives to answer in order that the knowledge base rests on a comprehensive and comparable foundation.

### *Structure of the initial report*

- **Background:** it is necessary to know how a particular initiative is situated in a system and its particular reform context; it will be relevant to compare how different initiatives are attuned to their specific backgrounds.
  - How does the future initiative fit into the wider policy and political context? For example:
    - Is the initiative part of a wider reform process, and if so, how is it expected to inform or influence that process?
    - What are the key reforms or other challenges for the schooling system that the future initiative will be addressing and how will the initiative contribute to these?

- **Aims:** the aims of the future project are critical and provide the basis against which the design and outcomes can be assessed. We can distinguish between the targeted aims of the particular futures initiative (in which we are particularly interested) and the general policy aims that set its context. Over time, the aims may also shift and this needs to be recorded.
  - What are the targeted aims of the futures initiative?
  - What are the aims of the reform process and innovation to which the futures initiative contributes?
- **Design and Methodology:** the key question here is how the initiative is expected to contribute to the achievement of the aims and the activities which are foreseen.
  - How is the initiative designed to meet the broader and targeted aims listed above?
  - What is the “project plan” for the initiative (timeframe, milestones, deliverables, etc.)?
  - Who are the main actors who will support, develop and participate in the initiative?
  - What futures methodology will be adopted (e.g. cross impact analysis, future wheels, scenario building and trend analysis, etc)? Which specific tools are envisaged and what is the reason for this particular choice?
  - What review procedures are built into the design?
    - Will there be a continuous formative evaluation? Is a summative evaluation planned for the end of the initiative?
    - Which measures and indicators have been developed to assess success or failure of the initiative for: i) the successful implementation of instruments; ii) the achievement of targeted aims; and iii) the achievement of the wider aims?

## 2. The Intermediate Report

23. The intermediate report provides the “state of the art” of the project after one year. It is an opportunity to report on what has been done and achieved. The Secretariat will process this information and provide it to the other participants through the SFT Knowledge Base so that initiatives can learn from each other while they are still running.

24. The report focuses on the actual activities carried out in the project and the outputs (like tools and approaches) and preliminary outcomes of the project. The small but influential informal decisions and events are relevant and not only the major procedures and mile-stone are reported. This will require a sustained effort of recording and reporting. Secondly it is important that changes in the original design as a consequence of learning or external events changes are reported. While there might be a temptation to give an “official version” which irons out all the wrinkles, it would be valuable to describe and analyse the difficulties encountered and the way these have been dealt with.

### *Structure of the intermediate report*

- **Activities:** this set of questions calls for a detailed description of what has happened within the framework of the initiative in the last year:

- Which methods to generate specific future tools have been employed and which tools have been created?
- Which activities (e.g. events, consultations, etc.) have been organised and when?
- Which participants have been involved in these activities?
- Which future methodologies have been used?
- Which review procedures have been followed?
- **Developments:** Have there been changes and developments since the initial report was submitted?
  - Have there been any changes in the aims and why?
  - Have there been any changes from the original design (as reported in the initial report) and why?
- **Results:** What have been the preliminary results of the initiative?
  - What have been the *outputs* in terms of products such as tools, methodologies, scenarios and training sessions?
  - What have been the preliminary *outcomes* in terms of reaching the general and targeted aims specified in the initial report?

### 3. The Final Report

25. The final report describes the second year of the project but focuses primarily on the results. The focus on results is essential if we are to provide evidence that “futures thinking in action” is indeed useful for increasing leadership capacity or improving the quality of policies and reform processes. It is therefore important to move beyond listing the concrete outputs or reporting satisfaction levels of participants, important though these are, in order to focus on the outcomes of the initiative. This will require a careful analysis of the aims of the futures initiative and the creation of indicators of success or failure in reaching those aims.

26. In terms of evidence for “future thinking in action”, the outcomes are especially important:

They should be linked back to the instruments used in the future initiative, so that the report shows how the outputs were produced, how the outputs have resulted in reaching the targeted aims, and how reaching the targeted aims might have had broader effects.

Measuring results, i.e. creating indicators for success or failure to achieve aims may not be possible for all aims; however, it is important that some measures are developed as these will strengthen the evidence for future thinking in action.

An initiative leads not only to the achievement of stated aims, but potentially has other wider effects. For example, a scenario exercise may be applied in new fields than the original reform process it was targeted at. It is not easy to identify unintended effects, but they are important and may affect, positively or negatively, the overall evaluation.

*Structure of the final report*

- **Activities:** it is valuable to have an overview of the activities taken place in the second year of the futures initiative.
  - Which activities (e.g. events, consultations, etc.) have been organised and when?
  - Which participants have been involved in these activities?
- **Developments:** an overview of where the initiative has moved on from the original aims or design.
  - Have there been any changes in the aims and why?
  - Have there been any changes from the original design (as reported in the initial and intermediate reports) and why?
- **Results:** At this stage, the future initiative will have been underway for at least two years and although not all results or effects can be seen clearly, the outputs and (initial) outcomes can be presented.
  - What have been the *outputs* in terms of products like tools, methodologies, scenarios and training sessions?
  - Which *outcomes* have been achieved in terms of reaching the general and targeted aims specified in the initial report? Specifically:
    - What indicators are there for: i) the successful implementation of instruments, ii) the achievement of targeted objectives and iii) the achievement of the wider reform objectives?
    - To what extent and how were the instruments successfully implemented?
    - To what extent and how did the implementation of the instruments lead to the desired targeted and more general aims?
    - Which unintended effects did the initiative result in and were these desirable or undesirable?