

Systemic Innovation in Vocational Education and Training

Paris, 4-5 February 2008

Summary note

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The purposes of the meeting were to:

- (a) discuss in detail and further refine the analytical framework of the study;
- (b) take stock of the selection of case studies, and
- (c) discuss and finalise the process of carrying out the country visits scheduled to take place in 2008.

This was a major opportunity for representatives from the SI case study countries, experts on the visiting teams and the CERI Secretariat to discuss and agree on the framework, methodology and organizational details of the case studies.

1. SYSTEMIC INNOVATION IN VET

Rushanara Ali and *Julie Caulier-Grice* of the Young Foundation, UK, presented a paper on Systemic Innovation in VET (EDU/EDPC/CERI(2008)1). The paper focused firstly on the concept of social innovation, defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs. The paper presented a typology of innovations in the public sector and the key stages in the innovation cycle. It then went on to discuss enablers and barriers to innovations and the alignment of ‘push’ (supply) and ‘pull’ (demand) factors for innovation and effective strategies for connecting them. The second part of the presentation focused on the issue of innovation in VET systems drawing on developments and evidence from a wide range of countries.

Marita Aho, of the Confederation of Finnish Industries, was the first respondent to the paper¹. In her response she focused on important aspects of the VET system that have direct links with change and innovation, including the issues of personalisation of teaching, appropriate training for the VET teaching profession, strategic leadership and sustainable development.

Anneke Boot, of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands, was the second respondent to the paper. She stressed the importance of sustainability in innovation and the fact that process is as important as content in any innovation. She also discussed the issue of ‘innovation fatigue’ – possibly due to past failures - and the importance of putting adequate pre-conditions in place in order to avoid failures and fatigue in the future.

The plenary discussion that followed the presentations focused on all of the above issues, as well as: the tension between social and economic demands and the need for VET systems to respond to both; the uncertainty of the labour market in the future and how this affects VET; the relationship between VET and Higher Education; and the importance of measuring the impact of innovations.

Dominique Foray of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, gave a presentation on Systemic Innovation in VET. After discussing the concept of innovation and alternative definitions of it, the presentation focused on the concept of ‘knowledge ecology’, i.e. the organisations and institutions

¹ All presentations are available upon request from the Secretariat.

involved in the production of new knowledge, and how this interacts with innovation. More specifically two questions were discussed: i) Is the knowledge ecology related to VET sufficiently rich and diverse that all areas of relevant knowledge are covered by research and development expertise? and ii) Do the institutional architecture and the incentives and reward structures available to VET researchers, teachers, and other stakeholders allow sufficient flexibility and mobility to stimulate and reinforce the connections that transform the ecology into adaptive innovation systems?

Hanne Shapiro, of the Teknologisk Institut, Denmark, responded to the paper. She pointed out that appropriate and sufficient links between policy, research and practice are important as innovation is affected by activity in all three sectors. She also pointed out that despite the growing importance of transferable, ‘learning how to learn’ skills, sector-specific skills are still of primary importance in the labour market and consequently in VET. The potential tension between economic and social dimensions also has implications when designing and implementing innovations in VET.

The plenary discussion that followed included the concept of ‘tacit innovations’ and whether these are adequately captured in the models and definitions discussed so far. The issue of incentives for innovation was also discussed, especially those tailored towards users, such as young people, and which have the potential to encourage bottom-up innovations.

2. A MODEL OF INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

Tracey Burns and **Viktoria Kis**, of the OECD/CERI Secretariat, presented a paper on innovation in education. The paper draws on previous work carried out at the OECD (primarily in the areas of industry and health) and the model presented is intended to be used as the basis for analysing case studies of innovation proposed by countries. The definition of innovation adopted in this paper is: *change in an educational context that is introduced with the aim of improving the operation of education systems, their performance, the perceived satisfaction of the main stakeholders, or all of them at the same time*. The model of innovation discussed includes the following stages: identification of needs, development of innovation, output, implementation, outcome, monitoring and evaluation. The whole cycle is informed by the knowledge base. It was stressed that all stages are not necessarily present in all innovations.

Oon Ying Chin, of the Australian delegation to the OECD, responded to the paper. She pointed out that the model as it stands may be too generic and equally applicable to any policy or programme as opposed to innovation only. She also questioned the extent to which the model captures innovations that are unplanned or that do not proceed in the systematic way assumed by the model. The role of stakeholders involved in all stages of the process is also worthy of more exploration as they can be crucial to the success of an innovation. Finally, Ms Chin suggested that the role of the political environment – how it influences or is itself shaped by the innovation – should also be included in the model.

In the plenary discussion that followed delegates provided the following comments and suggestions for improving the model:

- recognising and including tacit innovations, especially as formal structures and systems can sometimes act as barriers towards them
- the concept of ‘added value’ that an innovation brings to policy and practice and the connections between outcomes and the knowledge-base should be included in the model
- whether the model could be made more specific to education and VET in particular, as in its current form it could be applied to other sectors such as health
- the risk of failure could be included in the model

- the extent to which all stages of the model need to be present for an innovation to be defined as systemic
- the need to spell out more clearly the difference between innovation and reform
- if innovation involves a high increase in the quality or quantity of outputs or outcomes ('incommensurate leap in results'), then this also needs to be captured in the model

3. SYSTEMIC INNOVATION CASE STUDY VISITS

Tracey Burns, Katerina Ananiadou and Tom Schuller of the OECD/CERI Secretariat presented the guidelines to procedures for the case study country visits, the template of questions to be used during discussions with stakeholders and the structure of the country reports.

After the presentations participants divided into two groups in order to discuss the following three main issues:

- Clarification: Are the procedures and guides to the visits clear?
- Reflection on process: Suggestions to improve the methodology, stakeholders missing from the list, whether questions could be added or adapted so as to capture the nuances of the previous day's discussion? Also, does the proposed structure and content of the report make sense? Suggestions for improvement?
- Dissemination: What options or strategies could be pursued to best disseminate the findings of this project (in country and across the OECD)?

Groups reported back in the plenary sessions that followed. Issues raised concerning the study visits and improvements to the questions and report structure included:

- The need to obtain the views of academics or other independent researchers (eg from think-tanks) with an interest in VET and the case studies in particular
- The issue of leadership should feature strongly in the discussions with stakeholders and subsequent analysis as it is often crucial in a successful innovation
- Overarching questions that could guide discussions and analysis are: i) who is in charge of an innovation ii) who has an interest in participating in it and iii) who finances it
- The question of whether innovative capacity in the workforce was improved as a result of the innovation could be explored
- Risk aversion and the question of when and where innovation is possible should be explored
- Lessons learned from the case studies should include short- and long-term implications. This returns us to the use of evidence in policy-making and the tension between policy planning cycles and funding (limited, fixed duration) and evaluation/research goals (longer term, unfixed duration).

On the issue of dissemination strategies of findings the groups considered that the existence of multiple audiences interested in VET and innovation have to be taken into account. Possible dissemination outlets

could therefore include national or international newspapers, professional or practitioner journals or academic journals. One participant suggested that toolboxes could also be developed as part of a dissemination strategy of the results of the study, and also that clusters of countries with similar concerns could be formed to brainstorm on dissemination strategies for their countries.

4. INITIAL FRAMEWORK FOR BENCHMARKING INNOVATIONS IN VET

Francesc Pedró, of the OECD/CERI Secretariat, presented a paper on benchmarking innovations in VET. Developing a system of indicators of innovation in VET could improve our knowledge of relevant systems, policies and best practices and would help countries position themselves in relation to other OECD countries. The paper presented an indicator framework containing the following dimensions: environment, input, process and output and presented some examples of specific indicators for each dimension. This framework is still at an early stage of development and was presented for exploratory discussion. Participants were on the whole positive towards developing this aspect of the work further.

5. ACTION POINTS

It was agreed that the Secretariat would:

- Revise the template of questions for the case study visits on the basis of the group's discussion and send to delegates for comments
- Draft a short briefing note on the study that host countries can use when organising meetings with stakeholders
- Send out a complete schedule of visits, including timing and participants, for information and referral purposes.