

**Launch of publication:**

**Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills**

**10 MARCH 2015**

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**Stefan Kapferer, OECD Deputy Secretary General**

**Welcoming remarks**

- Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to be here today to be able to launch this new OECD report on the power of social and emotional skills on the well-being of individuals and nations.
- Before the presentation of the main findings of the report, I would like to provide some introductory words on the relevance of equipping children with the skills they need to achieve lifetime success and contribute to society, and on how the OECD can play a leadership role in moving this agenda forward.

**Social and emotional skills are central to the well-being of individuals and nations**

- Social and emotional education or character development (“Bildung”) has always been one of the central roles of schools. Social and emotional skills — such as perseverance, self-control or agreeableness — are key ingredients for individuals and societies to prosper. Individuals who persevere and work hard are more likely to succeed in a highly dynamic and skill-driven labour market. Those who work hard to meet goals are more likely to follow healthier lifestyles and remain fit. Individuals who are capable of managing their emotions and adapting to change are more likely to cope with job loss, family disintegration or crime.
- OECD work on education has shown that skills have become the global currency of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today, graduating from university alone no longer automatically

guarantees finding a good job. OECD work shows that increasing levels of formal education do not necessarily translate into better skills and better jobs. Young people are struggling to find jobs and at the same time employers are searching to find people with the right skills, such as team work, self-motivation, drive, flexibility and planning. In addition to having a higher-level diploma, it is essential to have these type of skills.

- Policy makers in a globalised economy face a number of common challenges. Globalisation and technological progress have brought major changes to the way people study, work and socialise. Mistrust and environmental threats are major issues of our countries. The future prosperity of our societies depends largely on conscientious and smart individuals who will be able to quickly adapt and thrive amongst any unforeseen challenges that tomorrow may hold.
- Last week, the OECD released another prominent report — “Fit Mind, Fit Job: From Evidence to Practice in Mental Health and Work” — which looks at the costs of poor mental health. A clear message emerged, which is that urgent action is needed to help people with poor mental health so as to improve their quality of life. Promoting the development of social and emotional skills from an early age is one of many tools policymakers can use to tackle this health-issue, which is critical for well-being and economic growth.
- We need to find better ways to enhance the right set of social and emotional skills. In the past, we could rely on families and social institutions to build social and emotional skills. But nowadays, families are changing – they are getting smaller and less stable, and more women are at work. Plus, social institutions have become more vulnerable because of the financial crisis. The capacity of families and social institutions to help advance such skills has diminished, making it even more important to build explicit objectives for public policy around this agenda.

## Increasing evidence on the power of social and emotional skills

- Science has sufficiently advanced so that we can now understand, conceptualise and measure social and emotional skills more systematically. The OECD work presented here today, is an international attempt to better understand the power of such skills. It confirms work by other researchers — some of them here with us this afternoon in person or via WebEx — who suggests that these skills are needed to secure positive life outcomes.
- The report **“Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills”** presents a synthesis of the existing evidence including the new longitudinal data analyses in 9 countries. The findings confirm that social and emotional skills do in fact matter for improving children’s lives; that such skills are malleable; and that they can be taught at home and school through adequate practices. The report also provides a range of examples of learning practices that have worked in raising social and emotional skills.
- Our report confirms prior national research in this area. The importance of social and emotional skills goes far beyond succeeding at school, finding a job or earning a good salary. These skills are particularly powerful in driving social outcomes. They can help individuals lead healthier lifestyles; be physically and mentally fit; participate in society and be happy.
- Additionally, social and emotional skills matter because they can help develop and enforce cognitive skills. The latest PISA results show that perseverance, drive and motivation are essential for doing well in school. Students who report that they do not give up easily when confronted with a problem perform better in mathematics than their peers with lower perseverance levels. At the same time, PISA shows that many students lack the levels of perseverance, drive and motivation needed to succeed in and out of school.
- Technological advances provide new insights into the malleability of the brain. People are not born with a fixed set of skills, but we can have an active role in shaping them. No-one is born as a “maths person”, a “creative person” or an

“attentive person”. We start our lives with considerable potential to develop these abilities, and whether we flourish or not depends on the learning contexts we are exposed to.

- Our report shows that schools, families and communities can play an active role in fostering children’s social and emotional skills. Children who lack stimulating learning environments, and those who are exposed to stressful situations, are more likely to lose out in their skills development. These children can benefit from receiving additional support to help develop the skills they will need to have the same life opportunities as their better off peers.
- Schools can contribute to equipping children with the kind of character-focused education that elite educational institutions have always provided for a selected few. Schools can make social and emotional learning accessible to all children and help foster the skills that will improve their chances of a successful future.

### **The OECD can play a leadership role**

- The OECD has been at the forefront of the international work on measuring well-being and social progress for more than ten years now. The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission on the “Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress” was one of the first initiatives the OECD participated in, with the aim to better understand the wide range of factors that are important for individuals and societies to improve well-being and social progress.
- The aftermath of the crisis motivated the OECD to reflect on new approaches to tackle some long-standing global problems. Since then, initiatives like “The New Approaches to Economic Challenges” (NAEC) and the most recent one on “Inclusive Growth” have been exploring how to better confront today’s challenges and upcoming trends. Its objectives also include strengthening the evidence base on the relationship between policy drivers, skills and well-being outcomes. Our work on skills for social progress contributes to these activities.

- There is a key opportunity for the OECD to play a leadership role for knowledge mobilisation and policy development in the area of social and emotional skills. We are building the tools for doing so through our work across different activities, including the “Education 2030 project (looking at how to prepare students for the challenges they will be facing in 2030), PISA, the early learning outcomes project and the longitudinal survey of skills development in cities.

### **The way forward**

- We are at the very beginning of a major effort that will require significant investments on many fronts. But the potential benefits for the well-being of individuals and nations will dwarf any conceivable costs. This further work is greatly needed in order to offer policy-makers, teachers and parents tools that can be useful to improve children’s learning contexts.
- The OECD’s project on Education and Social Progress (ESP) is developing an international longitudinal study on skills, which aims at identifying a set of social and emotional skills that could be learnt through adequate practices from childhood to adolescence. This work will complement current research in this area, and help to set future international standards for social and emotional skill measurements.
- This seminar will provide an overview of this report and the work under progress on the assessment of social and emotional skills. It will also allow us to exchange ideas on the importance of raising social and emotional skills; to share experiences on promoting social and emotional learning; to understand the challenges schools and teachers are facing in implementing adequate practices; and to learn from each other about promising policies and initiatives that have changed children’s lives.
- Nelson Mandela once said “The greatest glory in living lies not in ever falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

- Nelson Mandela was a unique human-being, admired for an extraordinary combination of qualities, such as intelligence, perseverance, courage, commitment and hard work. It is clear that not anyone can be like Mandela as he was unique in many ways. However, his words will remain immortal. He is an example that can encourage people to develop their social and emotional skills.
- I look forward to today's discussions and wish you a productive and stimulating afternoon.