Introduction

With the ongoing analysis of the PISA 2000 data, the preparation of the release of the results of PISA 2003 and the establishment of directions for PISA 2006, those involved in PISA at both national and international levels have been kept very busy.

This newsletter will focus on:

- Initiatives carried by countries following the release of the PISA 2000 results.
- Features of the PISA 2003 assessment
- Preparations for reporting on PISA 2003
- Participation in the PISA 2006 cycle
- Recent releases and forthcoming meetings

PISA 2000

Country initiatives

Since its release at the end of 2001, the PISA 2000 dataset has provided participating countries with an opportunity to focus on issues which are of particular interest to them. Most countries produced a report highlighting their individual performance in PISA 2000. Some took one step further as illustrated below.

Denmark

Results from PISA 2000 provided evidence that primary and lower secondary schools are currently falling short of the expectations of Danish society. In 2003 the Danish Ministry of Education therefore agreed that the OECD Secretariat undertake a Pilot Review of the quality and equity of schooling outcomes in Denmark.

The review has drawn on PISA results from other countries as well as detailed information on institutions and policy in three reference countries for insights into what might explain the Danish results on PISA. A report on the results will be published by the OECD in September 2004.

The Nordic Countries

Just before the release of the results of PISA 2000, members from the national PISA groups in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden met to discuss the possibility of publishing a Nordic PISA report. The purpose of such a report was to shed light on the Nordic results in PISA 2000 to see what similarities and differences there were within the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and between the Nordic and other countries. The report Northern Lights on PISA was published in May 2003 by the University of Oslo.

Germany

When the PISA 2000 results were made available, Germany was particularly disappointed with its performance and a heated debate ensued. As a result, the German Ministry of Education (BMBF) commissioned the German Institute for International Educational Research (DIPF) to carry out a research project with the aim of drawing lessons from some of the more successful countries.
in PISA 2000. The education systems of Canada, Finland, France, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom were compared. The findings of the comparison were then contrasted with the education system in Germany. The results of this project were published in the report *Vertiefender Vergleich der Schulsysteme ausgewählter PISA-Staaten*. The report currently only exists in German. An English version of the report will be published shortly. The OECD will also soon publish a report in English based on the results of the study.

**Canada**

One particular interest in Canada is the transitions in young people’s lives between education, training and work. In order to explore this field further Canada’s Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) was developed in the late 1990s at the initiative of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) now called Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The survey is a collaborative effort between HRSDC, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), Statistics Canada and the Provincial Ministries and Departments of Labour and Education, and aims to follow the progress of Canadian youth by interviewing them every two years.

For the first cycle of the survey in 2000, data was collected from two age groups of youth. One began its participation at age 15 and the other at ages 18 to 20. These two groups were asked to provide information on their education and employment experiences as well as information on their personal characteristics. The group of 15-year-olds also participated in PISA 2000. The results of the first cycle of YITS for this age group were presented in *Measuring up: The performance of Canada’s youth in reading, mathematics and science*. In 2002 these two groups were interviewed again and their progress was recently reported in the publication *In and out of high school: First results of the second cycle of YITS*, released in April 2004. The objective of this second cycle of the survey was to try to determine what factors relate to dropping out of school at an early age and what differentiates dropouts who eventually return to high school from those who do not return. The report examines factors such as family background, abilities, self-perception, aspirations, behaviour, school engagement and school climate. By following the progress of the group which participated in PISA 2000, Canada hopes that, over time, it will be possible to examine the relationship between tested skills and knowledge and education and labour outcomes.

**Features of the PISA 2003 assessment**

Similar to PISA 2000, PISA 2003 has tested 15-year-olds in the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, however the major focus has shifted from Reading Literacy to Mathematical Literacy. In addition to the three existing domains, Problem Solving has been introduced. Students and school principals have also completed a background questionnaire which has gathered important information on student and school characteristics. Some countries have participated in the options to collect information on computer familiarity and students’ educational careers (which were explained in Newsletter Issue 9).

**Mathematical literacy**

PISA’s definition of Mathematical literacy is as follows:

*Mathematical literacy is an individual’s capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world, to make well-founded judgements and to use and engage with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of that individual’s life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen.*

Citizens all over the world are increasingly confronted with a host of tasks involving mathematical concepts. For example newspapers, magazines, television and the Internet are filled with information in the form of tables, charts and graphs about subjects such as weather, sports and medicine. Citizens are frequently confronted with topics such as “population growth”, “global warming and the greenhouse effect” and they are required to read forms, interpret timetables and carry out transactions involving money. PISA mathematical literacy focuses on the ability of 15-year-olds, the majority of whom are completing their formal compulsory mathematics learning, to use their mathematical knowledge to make sense of these issues and to carry out the resulting tasks.

**Problem Solving**

PISA’s definition of Problem Solving is as follows:

*Problem solving is an individual’s capacity to use cognitive processes to confront and resolve real, cross-disciplinary situations where the solution path is not immediately obvious and where the literacy domains or curricular areas that might be applicable are not within a single domain of mathematics, science or reading.*

The ability of students to solve problems in real-life settings is of prime concern to educators and policy makers. Students should be able to understand the information given, identify the critical features and their interrelationships, construct or apply an external representation, solve the problem, evaluate and justify and communicate their solutions. PISA
2003 has collected data related to students’ ability to solve problems across the boundaries of traditional curricular areas.

See also the PISA 2003 Assessment Framework (www.pisa.oecd.org/Publicatn/2003F W.htm).

Preparations for reporting the PISA 2003 results

A workshop was held in Paris in June to assist countries in the analysis of their data in preparation for their individual country reports. A further data analysis workshop for countries will take place in September 2004 in Bratislava.

The OECD Secretariat is currently busy working with the Consortium in preparation for the release of the OECD report on the PISA 2003 results planned for 7 December 2004.

As a result of a call for tender launched by the OECD for the development of thematic reports on PISA 2003, EDUDATA at the University of British Columbia in Canada has been awarded two contracts to develop reports on the following themes: Mathematical literacy – student performance and engagement and Teaching and Learning Strategies. The first of these reports is scheduled to be released at the end of 2005.

Participation in PISA 2006

Following a call for tender the contract to implement the PISA 2006 cycle was awarded to ACER. The PISA 2006 cycle will focus on Scientific Literacy. In addition, following a feasibility study which took place last year, the International Option of a Computer Based Assessment has been offered to participating countries. To date twelve OECD member countries are interested in pursuing this option.

For the PISA 2006 main study, in addition to the 30 OECD member countries, a total of 28 partner countries have confirmed their participation. To co-ordinate their participation, the OECD Secretariat recently appointed Ms Miyako Ikeda. Before joining the OECD, Ms Ikeda worked with the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP/UNESCO) in the area of monitoring and evaluating the quality of education and has gained wide experience both in the development and implementation of comparative assessment.

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Contributions

We are seeking input for future issues of this newsletter. If you would like to share specific information with other participants in the project, please contact Juliet.Evans@OECD.org