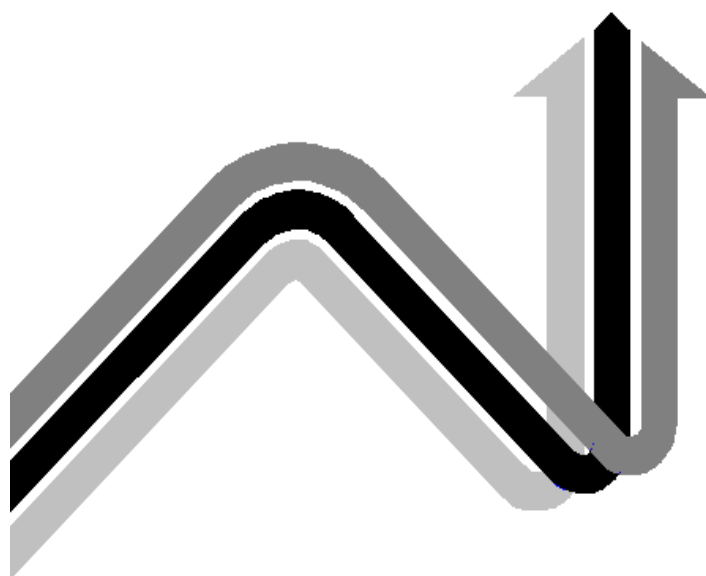


ROUND TABLE

MAKING TRANSITIONS WORK

Issues paper



Final Conference on the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life

21-23 May in Budapest, Hungary

Background

Transition goals and indicators

All policy is improved by careful programme evaluation. National transition *systems* typically consist of many programmes, directed at different client groups and intended to serve different purposes. In evaluating the effectiveness of transition systems it is important to go beyond the evaluation of individual programmes and to examine how the several elements of a transition system work as a package. This approach allows conclusions to be drawn about the ways in which programmes are complementary, and about the existence of gaps in programme provision. Assessing the effectiveness of policy implementation involves both setting out the goals of a transition system and seeking indicators of the extent to which these goals are met.

The OECD's Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life has outlined seven basic goals that all national transition policies should aim for:

- High proportions of young people completing a full upper secondary education with a recognised qualification for either work, tertiary study or both.
- High levels of knowledge and skill among young people at the end of the transition phase.
- A low proportion of teenagers being at the one time not in education and unemployed.
- A high proportion of those young adults who have left education having a job¹.
- Few young people remaining unemployed for lengthy periods after leaving education.
- Stable and positive employment and educational histories in the years after leaving upper secondary education; and
- An equitable distribution of outcomes by gender, social background and region.

No single indicator -- such as the youth unemployment rate -- can evaluate a country's success in achieving these goals. Multiple indicators are needed: labour market indicators; education indicators; and indicators of the interaction between the two. The Thematic Review has used 14 basic indicators: unemployment to population ratios, unemployment duration, employment to population ratios, youth to adult unemployment ratios, school retention measures, literacy rates and education qualification rates are among these. Many of these indicators are separately provided for teenagers (15-19 year-olds) and young adults (20-24 year-olds), and all are given separately for males and females.

¹ And preferably this should exclude involuntary temporary or part-time work.

Evaluating transition systems

When transition outcomes are analysed using multiple indicators, it becomes clear that simple and simplistic judgements about “success” must be replaced by a more complex process of evaluation:

- Typically countries do not perform well on all indicators or poorly on all indicators, but well on some and poorly on others.
- Outcomes can differ between education and labour market indicators; between different age groups; and between males and females.
- No single transition pathway has a monopoly over successful outcomes. Countries in which apprenticeship is the dominant model, countries in which school-based vocational education predominates, countries in which most young people take part in general education, and countries that have a broad mix of pathways can all demonstrate good transition outcomes.

These differences emphasise that there is no unique or single solution to national transition problems. What counts is less the nature of the pathways that are provided than their quality and their responsiveness to national labour markets.

The Thematic Review points to six key ingredients of effective transition systems:

- A healthy economy and a well functioning labour market, including a labour market that is “youth friendly”;
- Well organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study;
- Ample opportunities to combine education with workplace experience;
- Tightly knit safety nets for those at risk;
- Good information and guidance; and
- Effective institutions and processes.

Much of national thinking about transition policies has had its origins in attempts over a 25 year period to deal more effectively with youth unemployment and with those at risk in the transition. Many of the initiatives that have preoccupied policy makers in many countries have concentrated upon improving vocational education pathways. In improving national transition systems the challenge that policy makers face is to create comprehensive policy packages that encompass *all* young people. Such comprehensive policy packages need to include special provision for those at risk in the transition, but should not focus upon those at risk in isolation. They should pay attention to the effectiveness of vocational pathways, but also to the ways in which the needs of young people in upper secondary general education pathways and in tertiary education pathways are met. The Thematic Review suggests that rather than attempting to seek single solutions, the challenge is to attempt to combine the key ingredients of successful transition systems in ways that are tailored both to the particular transition problems that countries face and to national traditions, cultures and institutional arrangements.

Questions for discussion

- How might countries implement more comprehensive and integrated policy packages to improve young people's transition from initial education to working life?
- What barriers face policy makers in developing better measures of the overall performance of transition *systems*, to complement evaluations of individual transition *programmes*?
- How useful do countries find the Thematic Review's key ingredients of successful transition systems in analysing national transition problems?
- Of the key ingredients of successful transition systems suggested by the Thematic Review, which seem more easily able to be adapted across national borders, and which seem to be less easily adapted to different national contexts?
- How might indicators of transition outcomes be better related to national transition policy priorities?
- Among the many indicators of the effectiveness of transition systems, which appear to be the more important?
- What are some of the more important gaps in indicators of the effectiveness of transition systems? What types of data are needed to improve existing indicators?