MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL
DRAFT COMMUNIQUE

(Note by the Secretariat)

This document has been revised in light of the comments received on the EDG as of February 12th from Delegates to the Education Committee and Members of the CERI Governing Board.
INVESTING IN COMPETENCIES FOR ALL

COMMUNIQUÉ

1. Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all of our citizens. It is our goal to foster the acquisition of these competencies, but we cannot achieve it alone. We must work with government colleagues, non-government organisations and the private sector to ensure greater co-ordination among education, social, economic and other policies.

In 1996, OECD Ministers adopted the goal of lifelong learning for all, …

2. As the transition to knowledge-based societies has accelerated, the need for higher level competencies for all has strengthened. In 1996, OECD Ministers for Education saw these needs emerging and adopted the common goal of lifelong learning for all. With it, they signalled two things. One was that our countries could no longer look so exclusively to initial education, before working life, for the development of individual competencies. The other was that equity had a new salience. Inequitable access to initial education not only adversely affects employment, earnings and social engagement, it is also mirrored in subsequent learning opportunities. These opportunities need to be more widely and fairly distributed.

on which we now build.

3. Now we have met to review progress since 1996 in developing and implementing policies to make lifelong learning a reality for all and to set an agenda for further development.

A review of progress on the lifelong learning agenda

4. A lifelong perspective has encouraged us to review the entire spectrum of learning: from the pre-school years, through primary and secondary schooling and tertiary education to adult learning. This view places competencies in a more coherent perspective and it focuses more clearly on the learner. It encourages us to set higher expectations for all: to build strong

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1 The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Edelgard Bulmahn, Minister of Education and Research, Germany. The Vice-Chairs were Dr. Han Wan-Sang, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Education and Human Resources Development, Korea and Ms. Margrethe Vestager, Minister of Education, Denmark. It was preceded by a consultation with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee and the Trade Union Advisory Committee and a Forum on Information and Communication Technology and Education.
foundations for learning; and to continue building on them, in part by developing people’s motivation and competence to manage their own learning.

**early childhood education and care, …**

5. In the early childhood years, our countries have different traditions and different styles of provision, but we are agreed that quality and access are key issues for policy, particularly for children in need of special support. Education ministries have a stake in ensuring that children have experiences that promote their development and learning. For this to happen, governments must ensure that all policies concerned with young children and families are coherent.

**schooling, …**

6. Our schools face competing demands to change. The problems of students leaving without adequate basic skills create a demand for a stronger focus on the development of core competencies. Problems of anti-social behaviour in schools and adult society, and more general concerns about loss of social cohesion, create demands for schooling to play a broader social role. Balancing these competing demands is difficult. One effective strategy is to link schools more extensively with providers of health and social services, particularly for meeting the needs of students at risk.

**the transition from initial education to working life, and …**

7. The boundaries between work and education are blurring: many students in upper secondary and tertiary education now mix education and work; and many workplaces find themselves under pressure to provide better for learning. The transition to work is also becoming more complex and drawn out. We seek to improve it with stronger links between general and vocational education at the secondary level, with more flexible options in tertiary education, and with improved career information and guidance.

**learning opportunities for adults.**

8. Adults’ demands for learning are also increasing in response to pressures, in the workplace and society more generally, for increased competencies. Formal education in universities and other institutions has a role in meeting these demands, but so too does informal learning: in the workplace, community and home. This makes the recognition of competencies, however acquired, a growing challenge. Funding is also an issue. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the present system by means such as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and credit for prior learning is one response. Increased funding is the other response. The public purse is one source of extra funds but we are also seeking to put in place incentives and mechanisms for learners, their families, employers and others to invest.

**Investing in competencies for all**

9. **Investing in competencies for all** has been the principal theme for our meeting since our goal is competencies for all - basic competencies on which other learning depends, and the high-level intellectual and social competencies on which full engagement in the knowledge society depends. Our role is to manage and facilitate investment to achieve this goal.
10. We recognise the increased demand for a wide range of competencies, in addition to basic skills and high levels of education, to participate in the knowledge economy. However, it is not easy to identify with sufficient certainty the new competencies needed. We are determined to work further on this, taking a broad view to include the needs of a knowledge society and not just those of a knowledge economy.

11. We have noted that significant inequalities exist in both educational attainment and the acquisition of competencies. We are determined to continue to take vigorous actions in our countries to redress these and to minimise potential new ones such as a ‘digital divide’. This will require setting high expectations for all and meeting them for all.

12. We have noted that, while the use of ICT in education is expanding rapidly in most of our countries, much remains to be done. The development of teachers’ own ICT skills is one need, the development of ICT infrastructure and support and of more effective uses of ICT as an aid to learning are others. We see the potential benefits and are determined to put in place policies which will help all students and teachers reap them.

13. We have reviewed some of the future development options for our schools. The more optimistic of these could be jeopardised if a serious teacher shortage occurs. There are serious concerns in many countries that it will and we need to explore together strategies to attract and retain high-quality teachers and school principals. We also agreed on the need to set high standards for our schools and to ensure that they have sufficient incentives to meet them.

Challenges ahead

14. Current OECD work on the determinants of growth and sustainable development reinforces the importance of human and social capital for both economic and social outcomes. The challenge for governments now is to maintain growth in ways that are sustainable and to share the benefits equitably. That will, increasingly, depend on effective co-ordination of education and other policies affecting growth and sustainable development.

15. One result of our discussion over the past two days is an ambitious agenda for future work with the OECD. In this work, we urge the OECD to co-operate with other international organisations, non-government organisations and the private sector as well as with our own government authorities and with the research and policy communities.

Strengthening human and social capital

16. There is great interest in the potential role of social capital in fostering sustainable development and growth and in its interaction with human capital. Further work is required to show how best education policies can contribute to nurturing human and social capital. The OECD is well-placed to help us in
growth and social development, …

this task and we invite it to:

- Explore further the relationships between human and social capital and their contributions to the sustainable development of human well-being and economic growth;
- Identify policies that strengthen the impact of education on the achievement of economic growth and social development.

**Enhancing the development of competencies throughout life**

17. Some of the competencies demanded in the workplace and other areas of life are changing and, as a consequence, some of the objectives of education and training need to change. We invite the OECD to:

- Clarify the competencies individuals need in the knowledge society and investigate strategies for enhancing their development and recognising their acquisition;
- Identify and evaluate innovative policy options for financing lifelong learning;
- Examine the implications of internationalisation in both the demand for competencies and the supply of education and training services;
- Further develop the work on indicators, exploiting the full potential of the new *Programme for International Student Assessment* to assess the preparedness of 15-year-olds for adult life, examining possibilities for further assessments of adult competencies, and extending the range of indicators with which to monitor the provision of lifelong learning.

**Building our communities**

18. It is vital to enhance the quality of our communities. Some of us are seeing increased alienation of young people reflected in disaffection and anti-social behaviour in our educational institutions. Although many of the causes lie outside the educational institutions, they must be part of the solution because they both reflect and shape their communities. We invite the OECD to:

- Review how education and training systems can increase their capacity to include all learners and to achieve equitable outcomes for all, while meeting the increasing diversity of learners’ needs and improving quality;
- Examine policies for strengthening the connections between educational institutions and their communities, and for enhancing the ways in which they work together to promote social values and citizenship.
Reforming teaching and learning

to explore ways in which teachers and schools might perform differently and more effectively.

19. Research and innovation lie at the heart of improvements in teaching and learning. Teachers are central to the enterprise and need to embrace a professional practice that is founded on the production, sharing and use of new knowledge about their work. Their recruitment and professional development are crucial: but there are serious difficulties. Most of our countries face an ageing teaching force, a decline in the status of teaching and serious problems in recruitment. At the same time, there are demands on our institutions to teach in new ways and to fulfil new roles. We invite the OECD to:

- Explore strategies for setting, monitoring and achieving higher standards of student learning for all;
- Explore how governments, educational institutions, local communities and others can collaborate more effectively in the creation, sharing and use of knowledge to improve professional practice in teaching and management;
- Investigate options for improving the quality of learning in both formal and informal settings, including consideration of the design of physical facilities and the use of ICT;
- Investigate teacher demand and likely supply, and options for recruitment and professional development.

Our expectations for the future

Our vision is of higher levels of competence, more equitably distributed.

20. Our shared vision is of increased levels of competence in our populations and of a more equitable distribution of this competence. Our task is to facilitate investment in competencies for all. Investment in education and training and other learning opportunities is an investment in the futures of our countries and our peoples. We ask the OECD Secretariat to work with us in bringing an international perspective to the development and analysis of policies to achieve this goal and to the identification of what works in practice.