DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
GOVERNING BOARD OF THE CERI

MEETING OF THE OECD EDUCATION MINISTERS
DRAFT COMMUNIQUE

(Note by the Secretariat)
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1. The attached document is a draft of the Draft Communiqué to be submitted to Ministers for their consideration as a statement to be released at the end of the Ministerial meeting on 2-4 April 2001.

2. The Education Committee and the CERI Governing Board are invited to:
   - REVIEW the draft Communiqué and to RECOMMEND any changes that might be made to it.
1. The knowledge economy and increasing globalisation combine to elevate the demand for competences—knowledge, skills and attitudes—in our populations. We need higher level competences, more widely distributed, for continuing economic growth and for the maintenance of social cohesion.

2. When the OECD Ministers for Education met in 1996, they saw these needs emerging and adopted the goal of lifelong learning for all. Under that banner, much has been done to expand provision and to improve access to opportunities to learn, though the task is by no means complete. We believe that it is now time to re-express the goal in terms of achievement, not provision or opportunity. The goal needs to be competences for all, and our task as Ministers is to do all that we can to ensure that our countries are effectively investing in competences for all.

3. This is not a goal we can achieve alone. As Education Ministers, we are responsible for substantial national investments but our activities are only part of the picture. We must work in active co-operation with government colleagues, non-government organisations and the private sector in the delivery of services. We need to take account of, but also to influence, government policies that have an impact on the capacity of individuals to access learning opportunities, for example policies for families, labour market training, taxation and electronic-commerce.

A review of progress on the lifelong learning agenda

4. The 1996 commitment of OECD countries to stronger opportunities for lifelong learning challenged governments to re-think the place of education systems in a richer, more demanding learning environment. It recognised that developing the competences of individuals depends on changing the role of the formal education system, encouraging opportunities outside it, and making more transparent the learning choices and outcomes.

5. Our institutions face many pressures. There are asked to develop different competences in their students and to play a significant role in the development of individuals’ values and their commitment to the wider society. They have moved to satisfy these demands but there is more to be done.

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1 The meeting was chaired by Ms. Edelgard Buhlman, Minister of Education and Research, Germany. The Vice-Chairs were ?? and ??. The meeting was preceded by a consultation with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee and the Trade Union Advisory Committee.
They are attempting to develop general competences – higher levels of competence in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, communication and problem solving, and the capacity to manage their own learning – but we need to be clearer about where the emphases can be placed with greatest benefit.

They are using ICT to develop students’ facility with the medium and to enhance their learning but change in the technology is too fast and unpredictable for the public sector alone to address the policy issues. We also need to respond to the risks of a “digital divide” that will heighten the advantage of those with better access to technology and readier opportunities to develop advanced competences in its use.

6. We are all grappling with aspects of the transition of young people from initial education to working life. We have been seeking, in various ways, to strengthen the links between general and vocational education at the secondary level and to provide more flexibility in the options open to young people in tertiary education but important challenges remain.

- The provision of more flexible and permeable pathways reduces the risks of students being trapped by prior decisions they have come to regret but it makes their options more complex and introduces a risk of loss of coherence in their learning. It also increases individuals’ need for information and guidance.

- With more young people continuing beyond secondary education, those who drop out early are at greater risk. We need better safety nets for them, but ones that facilitate their re-engagement with learning.

7. Perhaps the most important change that flows from a lifelong learning perspective is the shift in focus from teaching to learning. We are requiring our institutions to take a more ‘learner-oriented’ approach and we are also seeking ways to recognise and accredit learning that occurs in non-formal settings, including the workplace but the transformation is incomplete.

- Schools are giving increased attention to learning outcomes and institutional accountability but the information sources need improvement.

- Many tertiary education institutions, particularly universities, need to play a more active role in providing lifelong learning opportunities. Declining populations of school leavers may sharpen their interests in adults but they need to give greater recognition to prior learning to facilitate entry, accelerate completion and minimise costs for adults.

8. Serious provision of lifelong learning opportunities increase demand for services by adults. Costs can be contained – the use of ICT and the accreditation of prior learning offering prospects on this front – but additional resources are required. We believe that public investment should be strategically targeted to those in greatest need and with the least capacity to pay. Beyond that, we seek to provide incentives and enabling mechanisms for learners, their families, employers and others to mobilise larger investments in learning. Changes in tax regimes and capital market reporting practices can provide access to less expensive capital for individuals and enterprises, and thus strengthen incentives to invest in competence building, but further policy analysis is needed.

- For individuals without savings to invest in their own learning, other sources of funding are essential. Some controlled entitlement to public funding or access to pre-tax earnings set aside for the purpose are strategies some of us are pursuing. We need to see if these incentives work as anticipated and, if they do, to consider wider application of them.
For enterprises, better reporting of the value to their business of their investment in staff competences could lead to greater recognition by the investment community of this ‘intangible’ and, in turn, to an increased incentive for enterprises to invest in staff learning.

9. Taking a lifelong perspective on learning has encouraged us to look to the pre-school years as well as to the primary and secondary years to build the foundation for lifelong learning. Just where institutional provision enters, and for which children, varies according to our national traditions but we are all agreed that the key issues for policy are quality and access in the years before compulsory schooling.

- There are many players involved – the families, other adult care givers and teachers, a range of government departments, and a variety of non-government organisations. Integrated policy development is essential.

- Quality needs to be considered at a number of levels – staff recruitment and training, working conditions, pedagogy (including the important question of precisely how the pre-school years should build a foundation for schooling).

- Expanded provision is necessary in many countries, with public investment required if equitable access is to be available, particularly to children in need of special support.

10. We share a desire to monitor the effectiveness of our policies and we believe that internationally comparable indicators significantly strengthen our capacity to do so. We welcome the development of the OECD Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) with its direct measurement of learning outcomes. We await with great interest the results of the first testing of 15-year-olds in 2000 and look to the analyses of those data to address questions of effectiveness and equity in our education systems. We also look for further developments.

- The coverage of cross-curricular competences in PISA needs to be extended to fit better with the conception of competences in which we seek to invest.

- Taking a lifelong perspective on learning, we also need better information on the competences of the adult population, including competences acquired outside formal education.

- We also need to know more about how human competences influence economic and social development.

An agenda for future work

11. As Education Ministers, we insist that life is about more than work. Education and learning have goals beyond preparation for working life, important though that goal is. We are concerned about human and social well-being and not just economic well-being and it is to those broader ends that we also seek to direct investment in competence. In this endeavour, we will continue to collaborate in sharing the lessons we learn from our policy initiatives and we will look to the OECD for further work on:

- ways to enhance the development of competences throughout life, particularly for those with low levels of competences and little success in prior programmes;

- strategies for reforming teaching and learning in both formal and non-formal settings;
− strategies to increase the contribution of education and training to building community and increasing international understanding;

− ways to monitor more adequately the effectiveness and efficiency of our education and training systems.

**Enhancing the development of competences throughout life**

12. We need better information about the competences required for the information society. Much is claimed about new competences being required, and we see some evidence of it, but we need more systematic information about the nature of changes in the workplace and other areas of modern life in order to clarify the competences in which we should be investing.

13. Enhanced development of competences will also depend on increased access to learning opportunities. We have gained valuable insights into strategies for lowering the barriers to access and increasing incentives for individuals and enterprises to invest in the development of competences but we see the opportunities being taken up predominantly by those who are already best prepared. We need policy options that will enhance equity in access by motivating the least qualified adults to avail themselves of opportunities and to learn more.

14. The goal we set for investment is the widespread development of relevant competences. The means lie in financial resources, curriculum and pedagogy, as well as in the development of the capacity of individual learners to manage their own learning through access, increasingly electronic, to widely dispersed information sources. We need to know more about the learning processes of children, young people and adults and their implications for curriculum and pedagogy. We need to learn more about the relative cost-effectiveness of the alternative strategies.

**Strategies for reforming teaching and learning**

15. There is a good deal of innovation and experimentation in our education and training systems though much of it is isolated. There is an increasing focus on the learner, an increasing use of ICT and better linkage between the formal and non-formal sectors but reform needs to be more systematic and more widespread. For that, we could learn from how knowledge is created, mediated and used in other domains.

16. Teachers are central to the whole enterprise and their recruitment and professional development are crucial. Some of us face an ageing teaching force and an impending shortage. Most of us are faced with a decline in the status of teaching with serious implications for recruitment. We need more work on teacher demand and likely supply, as well as policy options for different forms of recruitment, for example attracting young graduates and experienced professionals to spending a limited time in the profession.

17. We also need to explore more radical analyses of the nature of teachers’ work. A shift in focus from teaching to learning and increased use of ICT to give access to resources outside the institution open possibilities for significant restructuring of the roles of teachers. There is also the issue of whether it is possible to raise the status of such a large profession and whether elevated status should be sought, instead, for only some categories of a more differentiated teaching force.
Building community and increasing international understanding

18. We accept that education and training have a strong instrumental role in building competences for individuals’ effective engagement in economic and social life but we do not limit the role to this. We want the quality of community enhanced in our countries and believe that education and training can make an important contribution through the development of both human and social capital. We recognise that clarifying the relationships of education and training and human and social capital is a long-term agenda but believe it is important to build upon the current OECD work in this area.

19. We also look beyond our national borders in seeing a need for increased international understanding. Domestic curricula can contribute but opportunities for individuals to study in another country can make an invaluable contribution. Some of us pursue student exchange primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of cultural exchange. Others see the enrolment of foreign students as an important and legitimate trade in education services. Whatever the primary orientation, we believe that exchange has the potential to enrich cultural understanding. We note that exchanges were supported by the G8 Heads of Government in 1999 and the G8 Education Ministers in 2000. We look to OECD, not for any facilitation of exchange, but for analytic work on the potential benefits.

20. Electronic provision of education and training across borders is bringing in new players and potentially weakening the role of governments in monitoring and seeking to assure quality. We note that trade in education services is a matter before the World Trade Organisation, as part of its review of trade in professional services, but we want broader issues to be examined as well – expansion of access, quality control and the potential for enhanced international understanding through cross-national enrolment, with or without cross-border movement of students.

Improved monitoring of the effectiveness and efficiency of education and training systems

21. The views we have of our education and training systems have been enhanced by the statistics and indicators provided through the OECD. To improve the understanding of outcomes of our national education and training enterprises, we encourage continuing efforts to improve the comparability of statistics and indicators with which our education and training provisions are characterised – costs of provision, processes at the school level and the competence profiles of young people and adults.

22. We welcome the active collaboration with UNESCO and the World Bank in extending the OECD indicator work to non-Member countries through the World Education Indicators (WEI) programme and also the increasing participation of non-Member countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). We encourage further collaboration.

Our expectations for the future

23. In this Communiqué we have set down goals for our own national efforts as well as for the work to be done co-operatively through our engagement in OECD. We have quite deliberately described our intention as Investment in competences for all because we wish to focus on what needs to be achieved. Our expenditure on education and training is an investment in the futures of our countries and our peoples. Our vision is of increased levels of competence in our populations, more equitable distribution of those competences, and economic and social development as individuals use the competences for themselves and others.