EMERGING EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES IN OECD COUNTRIES

Meeting of OECD Education Chief Executives

Copenhagen, 22-23 September 2005

This paper has organised the emerging policy issues identified by countries into three broad topics to focus the discussions.

Barry McGaw, Director for Education.
Email: barry.mcgaw@oecd.org. Telephone: +33 1 45 24 92 10
EMERGING EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES IN OECD COUNTRIES

1. In preparation for this meeting, the chief executives of education ministries in member and observer countries were invited to identify the education policy issues with which they expected to be dealing in the next 3-5 years.

2. Emerging policy issues were identified by twenty-five OECD countries and two observer countries. The Secretariat has identified what it judges to be the most prevalent issues and, in this document, these are organised according to three broad topics around which the discussions in Copenhagen will focus. Discussions will make it possible to define the strategic objectives which will guide the OECD work on education from 2007 onward for three to four years.

3. For each of the three broad topics on which the discussions will focus, two main questions will be addressed:
   - What are the policy dilemmas faced?
   - What are the consequences for future OECD work on education?

4. The discussion on each topic will be commenced by one participant who will, briefly and informally, outline key policy dilemmas to be resolved in the area under discussion. In each session, another participant will be asked to note issues and tasks that could be remitted to OECD and, towards the end of the session, open the discussion on the second question above.

5. The three broad topics for discussion are:

Quality, equity and efficiency

6. Achieving both higher quality education and equity of outcomes has been one of the major objectives of countries in recent years. The policy issues identified by countries show that a lot remains to be done notably in the following areas:
   - Quality: evaluation culture; role of international benchmarks; individualised teaching and learning; individualisation of support for learning and motivation.
   - Equity: drop-out rate; school failure; inclusion of migrants and minorities; specific materials/content/assessment/pedagogy for vulnerable populations.

7. Furthermore, countries’ responses show that the efficiency of education systems (lowering the cost without damage for both quality and equity) is an objective of growing concern in several countries in view of the public finance situation. Efficiency issues relate to the performance of both institutions and teachers.
   - Institutions: autonomy; decentralisation; leadership; monitoring and accountability; governance; information system on institution performance; innovation capacity of institutions; knowledge
management; partnerships among stakeholders; preparing for declining numbers of children due to demographic shifts.

- Teachers: recruitment and career development; teacher education and training; evaluation of competences and performance; mobility in and out of the profession; use of information and communication technology (ICT); implementing best practices; raising teacher status.

Lifelong learning and the employment challenge

8. The issues raised by countries during the first chief executive meeting in 2003 were about early childhood education and care, national qualifications systems, career guidance policy, financing lifelong learning and formal, non-formal and informal settings for adult learning. From the issues presently identified, it seems that the priority is employment (raising the participation rate, lowering unemployment, increasing productivity) and notably how the education agenda can best be advanced as regards vocational education and training and adult learning.

- Vocational education and training: quantity, quality and financing issues; improvement of information and guidance systems; permeability among different education paths; co-operation among all stakeholders at both the national and regional levels; linking the world of learning and the world of work.
- Adult learning: adaptation of the labour force to the needs of the knowledge economy and to demographic situation (e.g. ageing population); financing and incentives issues; national qualifications system; co-operation between stakeholders; use of ICT; connectedness with other socio-economic policies; international assessment of adult competencies.

The challenges of globalisation

9. Globalisation was tackled last time through the challenges it posed to tertiary education. While the reform of this sector is still an issue identified by countries, some others are raised which relate to the globalisation process.

- Higher education in a globalising world: qualifications framework; the Bologna Process; extending the traditional role of higher education higher education; governance reforms; quality evaluation and assurance; financing; research capacity and funding; higher education competitiveness; quality of faculty; demand for new competencies; attractiveness of scientific careers; innovation and intellectual capital; co-operation with private sector and higher education institutions.
- Migration: education policy in line with immigration policy; brain drain/gain/circulation.
- Educational needs of a multicultural knowledge society.

1 The total number of issues identified by responding countries is quite large, some countries having listed more than twenty, though others offered only a small number. Whether the difference reflects differences in the number of issues faced or in the selectiveness of the responses is not clear.

The request to the chief executives was to identify policy issues, not new policy challenges and, indeed, many of those listed are not new. Some, however, are and worth noting in view of this, for instance:

- Extending the traditional role of higher education to new needs of the economy and society (Czech Republic)
- Shortening and focusing the route of young people in the education system through encouragement and implementation of new incentives (Denmark).
• Lowering the average graduation age to secure an earlier entry in the world of work (Denmark).
• Developing a curriculum to reach a more efficient school to work transition (Belgium, Flemish).
• Making initial education more intensive to hasten school to work transition and increase the employment rate (Finland).
• Providing at least upper secondary education to nearly the entire age group (Finland, Switzerland).
• Understanding the dynamics of change within the educational systems (New Zealand).
• Increasing the diversity of providers, drawing in more private, public and voluntary agencies (United Kingdom).
• Closing the skills gap with the main OECD partners (United Kingdom).

2 The strategic objectives that have guided the education work of the OECD since the first meeting of Chief Executives in 2003 are:

1. Promoting lifelong learning and improving its linkages with society and the economy.
2. Evaluating and improving outcomes of education.
3. Promoting quality teaching.
4. Rethinking tertiary education in a global economy.
5. Building social cohesion through education.