TOPICS AND ARRANGEMENTS: INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING 9-10 JUNE 2009

OECD Conference Center, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75016 Paris
27-28 November 2008

The Committee is invited to:

- AGREE to the following topics for the informal ministerial meeting:
  - Early intervention
  - When school fails to interest
  - What do we know – and what do we do with our insight?

- NOTE the practical arrangements.

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Background

1. The Education Policy Committee agreed to include an informal ministerial meeting (IMM) in the programme of work and budget for 2009-10, which the Norwegian authorities have offered to host [EDU/EDPC(2008)27/REV1]. The dates for this meeting have now been set for 9-10 June 2009.

2. The Norwegian delegation updated the Committee at its April meeting on arrangements for this IMM. The delegation noted that Norway had organised the wrap-up conference of the thematic review on equity, *Fair and Inclusive Education*, in June 2007, where the Norwegian Minister for Education and Research had indicated that he would like to organise a high-level follow-up meeting on this important theme. The Committee noted that this topic was of interest to many ministers, particularly in those countries that had a strong social inclusion agenda. The main policy recommendations to emerge from the thematic review on equity are summarised in Box 1.

3. In this spirit, the IMM has been linked in the programme of work and budget to the new output *Assessing Progress in Tackling Educational Failure*, which will follow on from the thematic review on equity. The IMM would both inform and draw on this work, but may range over other equity issues, depending on the interests of ministers. It will also make use of other relevant equity-related work that has been carried out by the Committee or will be tackled in the coming year.

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<th>Box 1. Policy Recommendations for Equity in Education</th>
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<td>Education systems need to be fair and inclusive in their design, practices, and resourcing. It advances ten steps - major policy recommendations - which would reduce school failure and dropout, make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.</td>
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**Design**
1. Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection.
2. Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity.
3. In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout.
4. Offer second chances to gain from education.

**Practices**
5. Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition.
6. Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.
7. Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education.

**Resourcing**
8. Provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling.
9. Direct resources to students and regions with the greatest needs.
10. Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts.

*Source: No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*
Possible topics

4. Since the April meeting, the Norwegian authorities have undertaken some informal consultations with other countries to identify issues and themes of particular interest to a large range of countries. The Secretariat initiated this process by drawing up a list of possible policy questions, designed to stimulate discussion and to help the Norwegian authorities to take soundings from others:

1. What measures would encourage and help schools to recognise when children start to fall behind and provide them with the tools and support to get them back on track?
2. How to keep kids from dropping out of school?
3. What indicators and tools do countries need to accurately measure their progress in improving equity in education?
4. What role does the language of instruction play in educational performance for indigenous people and for migrants?
5. How can disadvantaged children and their families be encouraged to participate in ECEC?
6. How to encourage and equip disadvantaged parents to help their children to learn?
7. Have schools become an unfavourable learning environment for boys and if so, what should be done about it?
8. How can schools deliver truly inclusive education and successfully mainstream children with special learning needs?
9. Is there an inevitable trade-off between excellence and equity or can you have it all?
10. How can resources be directed to students, schools and regions with the greatest needs?
11. How to use data on schools effectively to raise performance?
12. How can countries respond to pressures to reduce class sizes?
13. How far can, and should, education systems go towards minimising school segregation by socio-economic background (or other factors) and achieving high student heterogeneity in schools?

5. After taking soundings in Oslo and informally with other countries, the Norwegian authorities have informed the Secretariat that three topics have emerged as likely to generate interest for ministers. These are now proposed for consideration by the Committee.

Early intervention

6. This topic would deal with the question “What measures would encourage and help schools to recognise when children start to fall behind and provide them with the tools and support to get them back on track?”

7. Presentations on this topic would focus on identifying children getting into difficulty at an early stage; providing tools and support services for early childhood education, schools and teachers to assist them both in detection and in addressing the needs identified; and encouraging and equipping disadvantaged parents to engage more effectively in their children’s education.

When school fails to interest

8. This topic would address the question “How to keep children from dropping out of school?”
9. Presentations on this topic would look at special groups at risk of dropping out of the education system; the role of VET programmes, alternative paths and other policy initiatives to keep youths engaged in some form of education and training; and whether schools become an unfavourable learning environment for boys and if so, what should be done about it.

**What do we know – and what do we do with our insight?**

10. This topic would encompass two questions: “How to use data on schools effectively to raise performance? What indicators and tools do countries need to accurately measure their progress in improving equity in education?”

11. Presentations on this topic would look at measurement and tools to identify groups and individual students at risk; relevant information and feedback needed at the individual, school and system level to raise performance; more effective use of evidence to guide policy-making; the mix of autonomy, accountability and support arrangements to ensure that the needs of every child are addressed within the system.

**Organisation of the meeting**

12. The meeting would start with lunch on 9th June and finish with lunch on 10th June and will be chaired by the Norwegian Minister of Education, Mr Bård Vegar SOLHJELL. To set the scene, the meeting could start with an opening address reminding participants of the findings of the equity review *No More Failures - Ten Steps to Equity* and summarised in Box 1.

13. Participation will be open to ministers or their immediate deputies and they may be assisted by one official from each country. Invitations will be issued to OECD member countries and the European Commission, regular observers of the Education Policy Committee (including UNESCO and the Council of Europe) and the Enhanced Engagement countries of Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa. Countries not sending ministers may send one observer. The discussions will take place at the ministerial table and observers will not be invited to take the floor. Ideally, most discussions should be initiated by presentations amongst the ministers themselves, but one or two external key-note speakers might be invited. In addition to meeting sessions there are possibilities for discussions during dinner on the first night. Lunch breaks will be informal to provide opportunities for Ministers to mingle and network.

14. The Secretariat would prepare a short issues paper to facilitate the discussions. It would also prepare a background document or set of background materials and make it available to participants before the meeting. Ministers might wish to bring documentation on case studies etc. from their own countries to share with others.

15. The conclusions of the meeting would be given in a chair’s summary and the communication unit of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research would co-ordinate with the OECD on planning a strategy for media activities in connection with the meeting.

**Practical arrangements**

16. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research will be technically responsible for the meeting and will cover expenses for the OECD according to standard procedure. The meeting will be held at Holmenkollen Turishotell in Oslo and Norway will cover the hotel costs for participating ministers (or their deputies). Interpretation will be provided between English and French.

17. Formal invitations to attend the IMM will be sent to participants by the end of February along with a draft programme. Countries will be invited to signal the intentions of their ministers to attend as
early as possible. This will help the Secretariat and the Norwegian authorities to develop a final programme that will encourage active participation and stimulate a useful and rich dialogue for ministers.

18. Ministers travelling from afar may wish to have additional programmes, which might be prepared bilaterally or as thematic seminars in the morning before the meeting. These options can be explored with the Norwegian authorities directly.

Next steps

19. The Committee is invited to:

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