SKILLS BEYOND SCHOOL – GUIDANCE FOR COUNTRIES ON BACKGROUND REPORTS AND COUNTRY REVIEWS

This note provides information for countries engaged with Skills beyond School, the OECD review of postsecondary vocational education and training. It provides guidance on:

i) how to prepare country background reports; and
ii) the process for country reviews.

The overall project plan for the exercise, [EDU/EDPC(2010)21], sets out other arrangements for the review, including costs, timelines and governance.

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1. This note provides information for countries engaged with Skills beyond School, the OECD
review of postsecondary vocational education and training. It provides guidance on:
   i) how to prepare country background reports; and
   ii) the process for country reviews.

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the review, including costs, timelines and governance.

Country background reports

General

3. All countries are invited to prepare a background report, whether or not they will have a country
review. The background reports are designed to:
   • Provide a succinct description of the postsecondary VET system in each country as a basis for
     policy analysis.
   • Provide a framework in which each country can assess the strengths of their system and the
     challenges they face, as a basis for policy development.
   • Give countries the capacity to compare their own approach with those of other countries, as a
     means of mutual learning.
   • Provide the background information and a self-assessment to be drawn on for the OECD country
     review, where one has been requested.

4. Background reports should be drafted in English or French. They should contain descriptions of
the postsecondary VET system, relevant statistics and research information, and a self-assessment of
strengths and challenges. Where the relevant information is already available in English or French
electronically, it will be sufficient to describe it briefly and provide a hyperlink to the relevant material, or
attach an electronic copy. Given this point, and the widely differing circumstances and requirements of
countries, no specific guidance on the length of country background reports is offered by the OECD.

5. Background reports should be completed by the end of 2011, but those countries wanting an
earlier country review will need to complete their background reports earlier, as draft background reports
are necessary in advance of country visits. The OECD will provide comments on the draft background
reports but the contents and quality of the final draft remains the responsibility of the country. Once
finalised, country background reports will be published on the OECD website.
6. Those countries financially contributing for a background report that have not opted for a full country review will receive a short visit to the country by an OECD team and a brief published commentary on the background report. The arrangements for these visits will be individually negotiated between the OECD and the countries concerned.

**Background report outline**

7. The background report should be structured along the following lines.

**Description**

i) *Scope: programmes*

- Which programmes would you define as post-secondary VET in your country?
- Which fields of study do they cover and what types of career do they lead to?

ii) *Scope: institutions*

- What types of institutions provide these programmes?
- What is the mix of private vs. public institutions? (data)

iii) *Statistical overview*

Please provide summary statistics showing i) the current position, and ii) trends over the last 10 years in:

- Student numbers in different postsecondary VET programmes.
- The share of students enrolled in post-secondary VET programmes.
- The make-up of the student population in terms of age/gender, educational background and field of study, and social background.
- Drop out or completion rates (and how these are defined).
- Labour market outcomes from postsecondary VET programmes.
- Trends in demand and supply for different skills (disaggregated by level and type of study (post-secondary, tertiary, VET vs. general education) and field of study.
- Transitions into other educational programmes including academic tertiary programmes.

iv) *Mix of provision*

- How do you determine the mix of provision of post-secondary VET (which programmes, how many places in each programme)? What role does evidence on labour market needs play in determining the mix of provision and how is this information acquired?
• Which stakeholders are involved in determining the mix of provision? Through which institutions are their views expressed?

v) Workplace training
• What role does workplace training play in the delivery of these programmes?
• Are there any forms of quality assurance in workplace training?

vi) Access routes, second chance opportunities and equity
• Do barriers exist preventing students from moving between levels of education?
• What role does the post-secondary VET system play in providing second chance opportunities to students who want to re-enter the system?
• What kind of equity function does post-secondary VET play with regards to integrating disadvantaged groups?

vii) Transition to the labour market
• Please provide data, if available, on returns to different types of education including postsecondary VET (by level and field of education)?

viii) Steering and governance
• Please describe the steering arrangements for postsecondary VET programmes and institutions.
• How are responsibilities shared between central and regional levels of government?
• How are the different forms of institutions governed? What degree of autonomy, do they have in determining their staff, education offer and use of resources?

ix) Funding and incentives
• What is the balance between public funding, employer-provided and individually purchased post-secondary VET? (data)
• Is there a difference in government funding of post-secondary vocational as opposed to academic programmes? (data)
• What financial incentive mechanisms encourage individuals, employers and providers to engage in post-secondary VET? (data)
• What kind of student funding arrangements are in place? Are student fees subsidised? (data)

x) Social partners
• What roles do social partners (employers and trade unions) play in the system? Through which institutions?
xi) **Qualifications framework**

- Does a national qualifications framework exist? If yes, how is it structured and how does it bear on these programmes.

xii) **Teaching**

- What are the qualification requirements for teachers and trainers in postsecondary VET programmes and institutions? How are they prepared for the job? What kinds of teacher quality assurance mechanisms are in place?

- Are there problems of teacher/trainer shortage (data)? If yes, how are they tackled?

xiii) **Career guidance**

- Please describe arrangements for career guidance for students in the course of their postsecondary VET programmes, and for those potentially choosing such programmes.

- How are the career guidance professionals prepared and trained for their work?

- What career information base is available to students and career counsellors?

xiv) **Quality assurance**

- Please describe how quality is assured in postsecondary VET programmes (other than in workplace training).

xv) **Policy development and initiatives**

- Please briefly describe how policy in this field has evolved over the last 10 years.

- What developments and initiatives have taken place recently – or are in planning?

**Self-assessment: strengths and challenges**

**A checklist**

- Do the programmes on offer reflect labour market needs sufficiently?

- Is high quality workplace learning sufficiently well-integrated into the programmes on offer?

- Is there evidence of mismatch between the labour market skills provided by the education system and those required by the labour market? Could postsecondary VET programmes do more to fill the gaps?

- Are career guidance arrangements adequate?

- Do funding arrangements provide the right incentives for the different stakeholders?

- Are teachers and trainers in postsecondary VET sufficiently well-prepared, both in terms of pedagogical skills and practical industry experience?
• Do the programmes grant sufficient access to all those who could benefit?

• Are employers and unions sufficiently engaged, nationally, locally and sectorally, in the planning and delivery of provision?

• Are data regularly used by stakeholders to evaluate programmes?

Self-assessment in summary

• What in your view are the most important strengths of the post-secondary VET system? Are there examples of particularly good practice or innovative approaches worth sharing with other countries?

• What are the main challenges confronting the post-secondary VET systems?

• What lines of policy development are needed?

Country policy reviews

An overview

8. Country reviews are a central element in Skills beyond School. In country reviews, an OECD team offers analysis and assessment of the strengths and challenges of a country system, and makes policy recommendations, drawing on international experience and comparative analysis. The primary function of a country policy review is to assist the reviewed country with policy development, but they also provide a very important input into reviews of other countries, and into the broader policy messages for all countries that will be reflected in the comparative report.

9. An overview of the steps in their preparation, and the associated timeline, is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and Timing</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 (6 months before preparatory visit)</td>
<td>The OECD team and the country agree timetable and scope of the country review. Background report in preparation by the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (1 month before preparatory visit)</td>
<td>Background report delivered in draft, OECD team and national co-ordinator agree programme for preparatory visit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (6-8 weeks before policy visit)</td>
<td>PREPARATORY VISIT 4-5 day visit to examine the facts, and identify key policy issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 (4-5 weeks before policy visit)</td>
<td>Follow-up questions on key policy issues posed to the country by the OECD team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>POLICY VISIT 4-5 day visit to explore key policy issues and options to address challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (6 weeks after policy visit)</td>
<td>The OECD team delivers an outline of the report to the country. The country will provide its comments within 2 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (4 months after policy visit – firm deadline)</td>
<td>The OECD team delivers the draft country policy review to the country. The country provides its comments to the OECD team within 3 weeks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 (6 months after policy visit)</td>
<td>If country comments received on the timetable above, the final draft of the country policy review is published on the OECD website.</td>
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Roles and responsibilities: National Co-ordinator and Steering Committee

10. Countries appoint a **National Co-ordinator**, who will be the main point of contact with the OECD. He/she is responsible for the following tasks (recognising that others may implement them):

- Communications with the OECD team.
- Communications within the country about the review, including communication with other Ministries and stakeholder groups.
- Completion of the individual country background report and provision of information as requested.
- Organising the preparatory and policy visits with OECD guidance.
- Ensuring travel arrangements within the country for the visiting team and that the visiting team are accompanied on all visits. Providing interpretation where necessary.
- Co-ordinating country comments on the draft country review.
- Ensuring that the final report is effectively disseminated and utilised by the country.

11. Countries are strongly encouraged to establish a **National Steering Committee** including key stakeholders to support the work of the National Co-ordinator. Such committees greatly assist the process of both managing the review and making good use of the results.

The preparatory and policy visits.

12. Two visits to the country will take place. The preparatory visit allows for an initial broad examination of the system that will lead into, and provide the foundation for, a focused examination of key policy issues during the policy visit.

13. The **preparatory visit** lasts 4-5 working days. Drawing on the country background report, its purpose is to allow the review team to gain a good understanding of the system and how it works, and to make an initial assessment of both its strengths and the challenges it faces.

14. The programme for the preparatory visit will depend on the particular focus of the review and the country context. Typically it will include:

- Initial meeting with VET policy officials.
- Meeting with statistical and research experts.
- Meetings with key stakeholders, including social partners; where relevant, regional or local government associations.
- Visits to institutions delivering post-secondary VET to test formal evidence against the picture on-the-ground, and establish perspectives of active participants (headmasters, students, teachers).
- Final meeting with senior policy makers.
• Meeting with national co-ordinator to agree in outline the programme for the policy visit and any associated practical arrangements or requirements.

15. At the final meeting with senior policy makers, the OECD review team will set out tentative assessments on:

• The strengths of the country system, including significant innovations and practices.

• Key policy challenges where options for reform might fruitfully be explored.

16. Following discussion, these strengths and challenges will define the key issues to be examined in depth in the policy visit and the country review.

17. The policy visit lasts for 4-5 working days. Its purpose is to examine the issues selected during the preparatory visit in depth, explore policy options with stakeholders and develop recommendations.

18. As with the preparatory visit, the programme for the policy visit will vary with country circumstances and the agreed policy focus. It will typically include meetings with at least some of the same people met during the preparatory visit, but with a more targeted agenda. On the last day, the visiting team will present their tentative conclusions to national authorities and invite their reactions.

Practical arrangements for visits

• Format: Except where specifically requested, there should be no presentations at meetings. Following introductions the OECD team will pose questions and invite comments.

• Timing: 3-4 hours of meetings in both the morning and the afternoon. Individual meetings should last 30 – 60 minutes (without interpretation) and 60 - 90 minutes (with interpretation). Visits to institutions should note be more than 90 minutes. Evenings should be kept free so that the team can debrief. During both visits, one half day should be kept free towards the end of the visit for the visiting team to agree their conclusions.

• As far as possible, travel should take place in the evening by a comfortable mode of travel to facilitate discussion among the team (e.g. train is preferable to minibus).

• Interpretation: The OECD team will conduct its meetings in English or French. Interpretation may therefore sometimes be required.

The country policy review report

19. The country policy review report will be 15 – 20 000 words in length (plus annexes). It will include:

• Description: a brief description of the main features of the country system.

• Appreciation: identifying key strengths of the system, including local innovative practices, which need to be sustained.

• Policy challenges and recommendations: an analysis of policy challenges linked to an argued set of policy recommendations, and discussion of how the recommendations could be implemented.
**Dissemination**

20. Following publication of the country reports, we encourage countries to organise a **national seminar** to present the results of the country policy review. This will disseminate findings and help to crystallise support for reform efforts among key stakeholders.

**Resources**

21. The OECD (by virtue of the voluntary contribution made for the country review) will pay for:
   - Travel, to and from the country by the review team.
   - Accommodation and subsistence expenses for the OECD team.
   - Fees for expert members of the review team where applicable.

22. The country will pay for:
   - Internal transportation of the review team.
   - Interpretation costs.
   - Costs for dissemination of the country policy review (other than by simply placing it on the OECD website), for example through translation into a national language or a dissemination event in the country.