INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

"VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
OPENING PATHWAYS AND STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM"

Paris, 28th-30th November 1994

Vocational and technical education and training (VOTEC) has become a major issue on the policy agenda of OECD countries. Achieving high levels of employment, with well-paying and high value-added jobs, in an environment of intensified international competition, rapid technological change and other ongoing structural change requires a well-qualified and trained labour force capable of assimilating new combinations of knowledge and skills.

Providing young people with a solid base for productive employment and for the development of further skills means investment for the future. How such investment can be enhanced, and how governments, employers and labour can contribute to effective vocational education and training for young people are the main themes of this conference, which is the culmination of a five-year programme of the OECD Education Committee.

Some 170 participants from 35 countries will attend the conference. They include politicians, high-level government policymakers, representatives from the fields of education and industry, and prominent researchers.

"Middle-level" education and training -- at the borderline between upper-secondary and tertiary education -- is seen as the key response to rising skill requirements and to young people’s aspirations for higher-level qualifications. This type of education and training can provide a way out of the "academic drift" and alleviate rising pressure on universities, many of which suffer from overcrowding and limited resources.

New bridges are now being developed between vocational and general education. Industry-education partnerships (such as new forms of apprenticeship) are improving the relevance and quality of training, and new standards for the assessment, recognition and certification of vocational qualifications are being created. At the conference, participants will discuss recent developments and reforms and assess the effectiveness of various approaches.

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They will consider the extent to which vocational education and training can and should be provided through "educational markets" which emphasise consumer choice. Can the functioning of such markets be improved, perhaps through more effective institutional frameworks such as national qualification systems, the organised involvement of employers and unions and negotiated links between recognised qualifications and remuneration?

A further key issue is to what extent vocational qualifications should in future be conceived in terms of broad initial "foundation training", followed by modules of "add-on learning". Or is there a need for a more holistic conception of "professionalism" in initial education and training as a basis for quality, productivity and economic citizenship? A division might well emerge between continental European and English-speaking nations on this issue. Finally, participants will debate ways of achieving "parity of esteem" between vocational and academic education and of developing open and coherent learning pathways.

This international meeting marks the appearance of four significant publications on vocational education and training, the fruits of the "VOTEC" programme:

1. Vocational Education and Training for Youth: Towards Coherent Policy and Practice.
2. Apprenticeship: Which Way Forward?
4. Vocational Training in Germany: Modernisation and Responsiveness.

The four publications will be available at a Press Conference, Wednesday 30th November 1994 at 5.00 p.m.
OECD, 2 rue André Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16

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