



**2016 Skills Summit**  
**Skills Strategies for Productivity, Innovation and Inclusion**  
29-30 June 2016, Bergen, Norway

**Chair's Summary**

Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, Minister of Education and Research of Norway

Norway is proud to have hosted the 2016 Skills Summit in Bergen with the participation of 24 Ministers and state secretaries representing both OECD and non-OECD countries as well as two European Commissioners. It has been my great privilege to chair this event.

**Forging a common agenda on skills**

The Skills Summit brought together ministers with responsibility for a range of skills-relevant portfolios. Their participation testifies to the growing global recognition of the importance of skills for productivity, innovation and inclusive growth.

The Summit gave Ministers the opportunity to share their countries' economic and social aspirations for 2025 and how the development, activation and effective use of skills can help achieve them.

We have all shared concrete examples and challenges from our own countries' experience of building effective, forward-looking, whole-of-government approaches to skills policies.

We agreed that countries need to build more flexible and resilient skills systems in order to meet the multifaceted challenges we face in very uncertain times. Such efforts can be enhanced by greater international cooperation and such initiatives as the "New Agenda for Skills in Europe", recently launched by the European Commission.

**Linking skills to productivity, innovation and inclusion**

Together we reflected on how investments in skills can improve the lives of individuals, companies and society by driving productivity, fostering innovation, boosting growth and social inclusion.

Across all countries we find that there are large numbers of employers who find it difficult to recruit workers with the skills they need. At the same time, many individuals find themselves in jobs that require higher or lower levels of skills than those that they possess. These sorts of mismatches are a constraint on productivity and innovation for firms and on the economic and social well-being of individuals.

In an increasingly digital world, we will need advanced, specialised skills to develop and implement innovative workplace practices and transformative technologies that increase efficiency and result in new and improved products and services. At the same time, we also need to ensure that all people have the strong basic foundational skills that are required to adopt and adapt to these new practices and technologies. This includes not only literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills, but also increasingly digital literacy skills. Character qualities such as resilience, ethics, courage, and leadership will also be the critical to success in a future. All of these skills are needed to provide people with the foundations for thriving in a future characterised by uncertainty and ever-changing work environments.

Sluggish or uneven economic recovery in many countries has left large numbers of people still unemployed or inactive. Those with low levels of education and skills are particularly vulnerable, and these people are more likely to come from low socioeconomic and migrant families, thereby reinforcing disadvantage. As the skills requirements of jobs continue to rise and evolve due to technological advances and competitiveness pressures, many of these groups will face difficulties in upskilling or reskilling to retain their jobs or to prepare for new ones and will find that their prospects of earnings growth are limited. Greater equality of opportunity to develop and use skills is also critical for forging inclusive growth. This means that the education system needs to evolve to focus not only on the needs of youth, but also adults. And this is not only a challenge for governments to resolve. Employers, unions and other stakeholders also have an important role in encouraging and supporting continuous skill development in adulthood.

The implications of skills disparities for social inclusion go well beyond employment and earnings gaps. Having good educational and skills outcomes at the aggregate level is not “good enough”. Adults with lower levels of skills are also less likely than their more highly skilled peers to enjoy good health, trust others, and to participate in community life and the democratic process. All people should have opportunities to develop relevant skills, activate them in the labour market and effectively use them in workplaces and society.

We all pay the price when some in our societies are left behind. Our responsibility is to make sure that all people have opportunities to develop relevant skills, activate them in the labour market and effectively use them in workplaces and society.

Ministers expressed concerns that education systems are not sufficiently responsive to the changing needs of the economy and society. Improving their responsiveness will entail taking action on a number of fronts, including improving access to learning and labour market information, strengthening linkages with employers and unions, and encouraging greater participation in vocational education and training (VET). As learning becomes increasingly lifelong in nature, workplaces and the community become increasingly important places for developing and renewing skills. Partnerships with stakeholders – including employers, trade unions, student associations, education and skills providers, foundations and civil society organisations – are, therefore, also critical to ensuring that individuals and society have the skills need for their economic prosperity and social wellbeing.

When it comes to designing effective skills policies, we all agreed that one size does not fit all and approaches need to be tailored to each country’s context. Policies need to recognise and respond to the needs of different groups in society, but especially vulnerable populations. The

recent influx of immigrants demonstrate the importance of coordinated skills policies. Policies also need to be designed to be flexible enough to respond to regional and local needs, including by such means as providing greater opportunities to develop and implement policies at these levels. Whole-of-government approach is also important at the regional and local level.

### **Fostering a whole-of-government approach to skills**

During the Summit we have shared our experiences with policies and practices that have proven successful in our countries or that are showing promise. And we have also reflected on things that have not worked so well. We have learned a lot from one other. We recognise the OECD's ongoing analysis on skills which provided valuable insights to underpin our discussions. We call upon the Organisation to further deepen and broaden our shared understanding of skills issues. Such efforts also serve to respond to the challenges and aspirations expressed by countries at the OECD Ministerial meeting on Labour and Employment and the related Policy Forum on the Future of Work that was held in Paris, France on 14-15 January 2016, as well as OECD Ministerial Meeting on the Digital Economy: Innovation, Growth and Social Prosperity, held in Cancún, Mexico on 21-23 June 2016.

We reaffirm the value of the 2012 OECD Skills Strategy as a useful framework for countries seeking to build effective national skills strategies and welcome the OECD's plans to regularly update the skills strategy to ensure that it reflects countries' experience with its use and continues to respond to their evolving needs. In particular, we would encourage the OECD to explore further what countries are doing to strengthen their skills systems. This work will help us to compare skills systems and develop a deeper understanding of what works.

Finally, we welcome the Secretary General of the OECD's announcement of the launch of the OECD Centre for Skills. This will boost capacity to mobilise expertise from across the OECD to develop analytical tools, promote and support peer learning, and carry out national skills strategy projects with countries. This Centre will be a valuable complement to national efforts to develop and implement better skills policies based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

### **Charting the road ahead to 2025 and beyond**

To reap future opportunities and respond to emerging challenges, our countries' skills systems must become more effective and resilient. They must be responsive to the needs of people, firms and governments by integrating policies relating to education, labour markets, the economy, finance, health, migration and regional development.

Achieving this ambitious agenda will require comprehensive and coherent policy responses, developed jointly by all relevant ministries and with the participation and support of all relevant stakeholders.

Our responsibility as leaders is to foster a whole-of-government approach which builds bridges across ministerial silos and strengthens overall performance in the development, activation and effective use of skills. Fostering dialogue and collaboration among the various

stakeholders is equally critical to ensure support and concerted action. Making all of this happen will require strong leadership, commitment and a long-term perspective.

As Chair, I am very much looking forward to the next Skills Summit in 2018, which will provide us with an opportunity to meet once again to measure the steps we will have taken and to renew our shared commitment to improving skills for the benefit of all people in our respective countries.