Good morning and welcome to this conference on “Policy Evaluation in Innovation and Technology”, organised by the OECD’s Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry. By bringing policy practitioners together with academics and other researchers, we hope to stimulate a good exchange of views and experiences on “best practices in innovation and technology policy”.

Most, if not all, OECD countries are in a period of growing budget stringency; and questions increasingly are asked about the proper role of government vis-à-vis the private sector across the whole spectrum of policies. This has put a premium on “good governance”: the need for better priority-setting, streamlining, and policies that deliver value-for-money. I should add that these same pressures are at work even on international organisations such as the OECD – pressures to which we are responding.

As a result of these developments, the evaluation of government programmes is more important than ever. Governments need to know whether their policies make a difference: whether their support programmes are implemented with the right tools, whether they are well-administered, whether they are achieving the desired results, and at what cost.

Nearly every OECD country now evaluates at least some of its innovation and technology policies. But evaluation practices across countries differ widely, and the reality of evaluation often falls short of the rhetoric about accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of policy. Perhaps the weakest link in the chain is the feedback of evaluation results into policy design.

In the broad area covered by innovation and technology diffusion policies, evaluation becomes more complicated by the sheer number and diversity of policy initiatives, and by the fact that the objectives against which results are judged are often multiple and results can be far off into the future. The task of evaluation is made easier when policies have clear-cut, measurable objectives: for example, stimulating additional R&D expenditures; more mobility of scientific personnel; greater university-industry collaboration; or more access to new technologies by small and medium-sized firms.

The situation becomes much more complicated when the aims of policy are more indirect and diffuse: for example, increasing the knowledge base of the economy, or helping businesses to boost
productivity and workers to acquire skills. In these cases, it is even more important to clearly articulate what the policy aims are, and against which objectives the success or failure of the policy will be judged.

What is the role of the OECD in this area? Our Organisation is in the business of promoting “best practices” across our Member countries, taking due account of the differences between institutions and societies in OECD Members. We do this across many different policy areas. Our recent work assessing Member countries’ implementation of the Jobs Study recommendations is one example; our analytic work and recommendations on regulatory reform is another. The OECD’s Public Management Service also performs this service for the public sectors of our Member countries.

The term “best practices” does not mean there is only one way to do things. In the area of innovation and technology, for example, there are too many differences between countries in their science and technology systems, in their institutional structures, and even in their view of the appropriate role for government to be able to make “one size fits all” policy recommendations.

Nevertheless, the rich diversity and broad experience of OECD countries in the evaluation of their innovation and technology policies does offer valuable lessons. Some countries are relatively advanced in this field. Others are only now beginning to set up the kind of administrative apparatus that will help them properly evaluate their policies.

The objective of our work in this area and in this conference is to promote a sort of “institutional learning”: to gather information on which methods, procedures and institutional settings are most likely to yield adequate evaluations of current policies and act as a guide to future policy making.

Given the number and high calibre of participants and the wealth of experience that is represented in the papers prepared for this conference, I have no doubt that this group will be able to help us improve the ability of Member governments to evaluate their policies in innovation and technology policy.

Let me thank you again for joining us here at the OECD. We are looking forward to a very interesting and productive conference.