



Background

Trends Shaping Education looks at key economic, social, demographic and technological trends and raises questions about their potential impact on education. Using a variety of robust international sources of data, including the OECD, the World Bank and the United Nations, this work aims to inform strategic thinking and stimulate reflection on the challenges facing education.

The project offers governments the opportunity to consider the broader trends outside the world of education, which are nevertheless of great significance for education ministries.

No one can predict the future, but there are many ways to better prepare

The *Trends Shaping Education* project examines major trends affecting the future of education and upcoming challenges for policy makers and education providers alike. This work does not give conclusive answers: it is not an analytical report nor is it a statistical compendium, and it is certainly not a statement of OECD policy on these different developments. It is instead a stimulus for thinking about major tendencies that have the potential to influence education, and conversely, the potential of education to influence these trends.

Trends are just one of many ways to think about the future. The forecasts they help us make are very useful, particularly in the short term. But forecasting sometimes gets the future wrong, leaving us vulnerable to surprises. It can mean that potentially important changes that do not conform to the accepted model are ignored. It can be used to justify waiting to act until crisis is upon us.

The business-as-usual future, if it can be agreed, is never where we will really end up, even if we wanted to. Prediction is difficult in today's complex world and it becomes harder the further ahead we look. There are many examples of governments being caught unprepared for a big change, such as the 2008 financial crisis; or falling behind as the world changes around them faster or in a different direction than they had expected.

Workshop

Every government needs to prepare for the future in ways that use robust evidence effectively and responsibly. They have to consider not only the future changes that appear most probable, but also the changes that we aren't already expecting, and the many ways in which the world could be very different to the one we live in today. They need to that complement the evidence with a systematic consideration of future changes that cannot yet be captured in data—such as the unprecedented digital transformation of the global economy and society. They must transcend their own disciplines and silos, and discuss issues that may seem marginal but which in fact have significant potential implications.

Trends Shaping Education is the ideal starting point for this futures thinking. Using the publication as a starting point, the OECD can offer education ministries an in-depth exploration of the future, helping them to:

- make better use of the Trends publication and trends data: their complexities, possible disruptions, and normative implications of what the future might hold.
- situate education in the broader context and consider the education system as a whole, as it shapes and is shaped by the global policy environment;
- reveal and test assumptions, stress-test and future-proof plans, and generate shared visions of the future to support action in the present.

Changing how we think about the future helps us to better prepare today

Strategic foresight provides the tools to explore multiple plausible futures and their implications for policy. It abandons the idea that the future is ever fully knowable. The future is different every time we talk about it, and it is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Stiehm, 2010). It is full of subjectivity. There are always multiple versions of the future—some of them assumptions, some of them hopes and fears, some of the projections, some of them different scenarios, and some of them emerging signals of change in the present.

Strategic foresight is about systematically exploring different plausible futures that could arise, and the opportunities and challenges they could present. We then use those ideas to make better decisions and act now. The only way to make this analysis of the future relevant and impactful for policy is through interaction, engagement, and conversation. It cannot be achieved through passive observation and presentation of the future.

Dialogue is needed to develop useful ideas of the future and opportunities for action

The OECD *Trends Shaping Education* team has designed an interactive workshop lasting 1 to 1.5 days to provide education ministries with an introduction to the approaches of foresight, and generate new insights and perspectives for action as outlined above. The workshop is aimed at policy and research staff, but could also be adapted to include senior officials, educational leaders and others. The OECD Secretariat will customise the design, main themes, and approach in collaboration with the Ministry.

The workshop would consist of five main parts. A description of each part follows; see the mock agenda at the end for an outline of how the day would look.

Part 1: Introduction to Trends Shaping Education

The OECD team would present the publication, its objectives and main themes. Participants would be invited to consider the trends they feel best prepared for as well as those they feel require greater attention.

Part 2: Future shifts and critical uncertainties

Building on this, the OECD team would introduce examples of ways the future can be different to what we're expecting—trends that bend and break; events that catch us by surprise; developments beyond our control that we can never fully predict. Participants would be encouraged to consider some of their own in an exercise based on provocative questions and 'weak signals' of change.

Part 3: Developing multiple futures

Moving into breakout groups, participants would elaborate on the ways in which the future could be very different to what we expect, based on the previous discussion. They would identify some of the emerging, bending and breaking trends shaping education in multiple future scenarios. Each breakout group would be facilitated by an OECD expert.

Part 4: Challenges and opportunities

Breakout groups would identify the biggest challenges and opportunities that would present themselves in their alternative futures for their economies, societies, and education systems. They would then identify new actions to take up in policy and in their own work to better prepare today. The bulk of further discussion and follow-up material would focus on these implications for policy and practice.

Part 5: Conclusions

Summing up the conversation, each group would report in plenary what insights they discovered and what new actions they identified. Time at the end would allow for summing up and questions and answers from the facilitation team.

Outcomes and deliverables

The workshop is designed for policy officials to develop new policy options for further discussion. Following the workshop, the OECD team would provide a mini-report of insights, including visual representations of the breakout group discussions and a summary of challenges, opportunities and actions identified. The report would also serve as a starting point for further research and its content would serve to further enhance the usefulness of the Trends Shaping Education project.

Options for further customisation would include additional preparatory interviews and work to tailor the workshop to a particular ministry's needs, incorporating and building on current futures work within the ministry. The report would provide more detailed analysis of the topics discussed in the workshop, a synthetic futures analysis based on the dialogue in the workshop, and a comprehensive set of policy actions for further consideration.

Practical information

Duration: one full day (see mock agenda). If requested, an additional half-day could be added to allow for further discussion.

Participants: 20-25 educational policy makers and leaders is an ideal number. A larger workshop is possible but would require additional facilitators.

Facilities/materials:

- one plenary room; additional space/rooms for breakout groups (number of groups dependent on number of participants)
- blank wall/posters/flipcharts, markers and sticky notes for interactive group work.

Mock agenda: one day interactive workshop

09:30: *Welcome and introductions*

Part 1: Introduction to Trends Shaping Education

- Presentation of the research; goals of the workshop

Break

Part 2: Future shifts and critical uncertainties

Structured discussion to identify key critical uncertainties arising from the trends

- Discussion of futures using existing megatrends and scenarios work
- Further discussion of challenges and critical uncertainties

Lunch

Part 3: Developing multiple futures

Breakout group discussions to explore how multiple futures could develop

Break

Part 4: Challenges and opportunities

Breakout group discussions to explore new opportunities and challenges for education

Part 5: Reporting back and conclusions

18:00: *Close*