
ANNEX: Recent education policy developments in OECD countries

This Annex contains summaries of recent education policy developments in OECD member countries. The summaries, which were supplied by countries on a voluntary basis, are intended to provide an overview of major developments and sources where further information can be found.

Countries were invited to submit the summaries based on standard guidelines. The maximum length was 200 words per country. Due to space constraints, the entries have not been able to cover all significant policy developments. The emphasis was on outlining major education policy developments that have occurred recently or which are being implemented, and which are likely to be of most interest to an international audience. Countries were asked to be selective, and were not required to cover each education sector or level. The first part of each entry outlines the basic administrative structure of education. Contact details are provided where interested readers can obtain more information about the reforms concerned. The entries have been edited to provide a consistent format and observe space constraints.

Summaries were provided by 18 countries: Austria; Belgium (French-speaking Community); Canada; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Ireland; Italy; Japan; Korea; the Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Spain; the United Kingdom; and the United States.

The summaries emphasise the broad scope of education policy making in OECD countries. The countries have highlighted policy developments within a framework of lifelong learning, ranging from early childhood and preschool education (*e.g.* Austria, Korea and New Zealand) through to adult learning and workplace training (*e.g.* Denmark, Finland and Spain). The breadth of policy initiatives makes them difficult to readily categorise, although several common themes are evident.

First, almost all the countries have drawn attention to policies intended to lift the quality of learning in the compulsory school years. This emphasis has included more clearly specifying the key skills and knowledge that students need to achieve [*e.g.* Belgium (French community), Germany and Japan], introducing external evaluations of student learning and school performance (*e.g.* the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal), and strengthening teacher expertise (*e.g.* in teaching reading in the United States). The adoption of frameworks that specify learning objectives and accountability requirements have generally been part of a broader reform package that also provides schools with more operational autonomy (*e.g.* in Finland and Italy).

Second, issues of social disadvantage and student alienation continue to be major concerns, with programmes aimed at reducing the number of young people without qualifications (*e.g.* France and Germany), improving student motivation (*e.g.* the United Kingdom), or reducing differences in education opportunities across regions (*e.g.* Korea).

Third, the higher education sector has been a particular focus of reform in most countries. These changes have generally been in the direction of providing institutions with more autonomy within a framework of greater external accountability for performance (see Chapter 3 of this volume for more details). Within Europe a major impetus for higher education reform has been the Bologna Declaration with its goal of a common framework of higher education degrees, and several countries have drawn attention to changes in the structure of their higher education qualifications (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway). Finally, the organisation and administration of the education sector is undergoing substantial change in a number of countries. The moves towards greater operational autonomy for education institutions and more involvement by local authorities mean that central education departments are becoming less involved in the direct provision of education, and more focused on strategic planning and the evaluation of outcomes.

AUSTRIA

Austria's school system is centrally organised within a federal political structure. It has a high degree of internal differentiation, different school types, and a range of transfer arrangements between schools. Currently, efforts are being made to adjust the educational system to the requirements of the knowledge-based society and to establish a system of lifelong learning. Reforms of pre-elementary institutions, of the transition from school to work, of adult learning, life and career guidance, teacher employment, and financing of lifelong learning are supported by OECD review visits. Quality development and assurance is one of the priorities (www.qis.at). Work is under way on curricular reforms, quality standards and instruments for system monitoring. The details of forthcoming measures have been laid down in a White Paper on Quality (which will also be available in English). At elementary schools the core competencies to be taught and the appropriate teaching methods are being identified. In response to the PISA report, a large-scale campaign has been launched for the promotion of reading comprehension (www.lesefit.at). Other follow-up activities to PISA (e.g. in the field of natural sciences) are being prepared. Reforms are under way in the areas of initial teacher education, in-service-training and teaching assignments. There are concrete plans to upgrade the training institutes for compulsory school teachers to university level, and compulsory in-service training for teachers is at the trial stage. The new University Act of October 2002 provides universities with more autonomy and leeway for action (www.unigesetz.at). New areas of university autonomy include recruitment of personnel, financial planning (encompassing guaranteed public funding) and organisational structures.

BELGIUM (French-speaking Community)

A federated entity of Belgium, the French Community is responsible for education policy for the entire French-speaking region of the country (the Walloon Region and the bilingual Brussels Capital Region). During the school year 2001-2002, around 490 000 pupils were in elementary education (nursery and primary), 350 000 in secondary education and 140 000 in higher education (university or other). The main reform in the area of compulsory education (6 to 18 years of age) was in July 1997 with the introduction of legislation on the priority objectives for education. It defined clearly for the first time what those objectives were and, in a related measure, the Parliament for the French Community identified core skills to be achieved by all pupils at key stages of their education. A new education steering structure was set up to accompany the reform. As well as the above, a range of legislative and regulatory measures was introduced in order to ensure equal opportunities, including a positive discrimination policy and measures to assist new students, including immigrants. In higher education, basic teacher training was reformed to include 13 specific competencies with a view to attaining genuine professional status. A reform of continuing training was also adopted instituting rights and duties for teachers. Further information is available from: www.cfwb.be and www.agers.cfwb.be and www.restode.cfwb.be

CANADA

Politically, Canada is a confederation of ten provinces and three territories, each of which, within the federal system of shared powers, is constitutionally responsible for education. Canada does not have a central ministry, department, or office of education. It is difficult to provide a succinct overview of major education policy developments throughout Canada. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) gateway (www.educationcanada.cmec.ca) provides information about education. The website includes links to key governments and organisations that form the core of the Canadian learning community.

DENMARK

Responsibility for education is shared between the Ministry of Education, municipal councils and school boards. In 2001 the government established the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation to enhance interaction between business and the worlds of research and education. The responsibility for universities was transferred to the new ministry. The Ministry of Education still has the responsibility for non-university higher education (see www.uvm.dk and www.vtu.dk). A new university bill introduced a reform of governance designed to enhance universities' exchange of knowledge with economy and society. The main changes in university governance involve: a Governing Board with external majority; appointed leaders (Rector and Deans) rather than elected leaders; increased self-government;

strengthening of internal quality controls; and implementation of the objectives of the Bologna declaration on higher education. Several years ago non-university tertiary education institutions were offered the option of being merged into “Centres for Tertiary Education” (CVU). These centres provide education, in-service training and consultancy services in specified fields. The 2003 “Act on Career Guidance and Counselling” set targets and standards for counselling and guidance, restructured the training of counsellors to give them cross-sectoral skills, established the “National Centre for Education and Career Guidance” and cross-municipal centres for guidance related to post-compulsory education. Improved guidance and counselling is an important element in strengthening vocational education and training in particular. The government has set up a cross-ministerial committee to investigate policies to improve social mobility and diminish the negative effects of disadvantaged social backgrounds.

FINLAND

Education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in collaboration with municipalities. During the 1990s national control of compulsory and upper secondary level education was eased, and education providers now have considerable operational autonomy within national guidelines and objectives. This new operational culture entails rigorous evaluation of education. Formerly, the National Board of Education was in charge of the national evaluation of education, as well as the development of education enforcing the national core curricula. A separate Education Evaluation Council was established within the Ministry of Education in 2003 (see www.minedu.fi). The Finnish polytechnics are professionally-oriented higher education institutions that operate alongside universities. In 2003 Parliament passed the new Polytechnics Act which is intended to clarify their tasks and provide more operational autonomy. Polytechnics and universities together form the higher education system, and both have their own profiles. The tasks of the polytechnics consist of teaching, applied research and development; they also have a role in regional development (see www.minedu.fi). The size of the working-age population is declining as the post-war baby-boom generation reaches retirement. To alleviate the envisaged labour shortage and increase the employment rate, the Government launched a five-year programme in 2003 to promote the employability and career development of adults with no more than compulsory education. The programme will increase the supply of vocational and information technology education. Additional measures have been created to support adult studies, and to lift participation and completion rates (see www.minedu.fi).

FRANCE

The Ministry of Education is responsible for education, and almost all education funding is provided by the State. In education the focus of French government policy is on two broad themes: endeavouring to ensure that all students succeed; and placing the emphasis on quality in adapting the education system. Achieving these objectives has involved the development of policies and programmes focusing on the following priorities in particular: preventing and combating illiteracy; improving education in citizenship and combating all forms of violence in schools; providing better conditions for the education of handicapped and sick pupils and students; sharply reducing the number of drop-outs with no qualifications; reasserting the value of the teaching profession; improving linkages between general and vocational education; counteracting failure in the first cycle of university education; promoting student mobility; promoting the image of science and careers in science; and improving initial teacher education and in-service training for teachers. At the same time, continuing efforts are being made to improve the use of new information and communication technologies in education, and to promote the early learning of foreign languages and lifelong education. For further information, see www.education.gouv.fr

GERMANY

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal state. Responsibility for the field of general education lies with the *Länder*. The Federal Government is co-responsible for vocational training and higher education. In 2003, the Federal Government and the *Länder* initiated measures aimed at a reform of the general schools sector. These include drafting educational standards and measures to help both students with learning difficulties as well as students with particular talents. With its “Future of Education and All-Day Schools” programme, the Federal Government is helping the *Länder* to establish and expand all-day schools. The Federal Government and the *Länder* are currently discussing possibilities for

a scheme of national reporting on education. The Federal Government is intensifying its efforts to halve the number of young people without training qualifications by 2010, particularly through its “Emergency Programme to Reduce Youth Unemployment” and its programme “BQF”. The emergency programme encourages the integration of young people in employment. Measures to enhance the suitability of young people for vocational training include pre-vocational schemes offered by the *Länder* and government financial assistance to encourage young people to gain secondary general school-leaving (*Hauptschule*) qualifications and participate in pre-vocational schemes. The BQF programme supports the disadvantaged. In the course of the Bologna process on higher education, the Bachelor/Master system has been included in the range of degree courses offered by higher education institutions. This not only involves the strengthening of the international focus of the range of courses offered in Germany, but also the reform of the content and structure of individual courses. For further information, see www.bmbf.de and www.kmk.org

IRELAND

Educational provision in Ireland is highly centralised. The Department of Education and Science, in addition to being responsible for policy development and the funding of education, also directly administers most aspects of school level education. A recent major study of the Department’s operations recommended that a number of key areas of its activity should be devolved to outside agencies, thereby freeing it to focus on strategic and policy issues and on the evaluation of provision generally. Three major initiatives are currently being undertaken, arising from the recommendations of the report. First, public examinations at secondary level, previously administered by the Department are, with effect from 2003, now the responsibility of an independent State Examinations Commission; this is intended to ensure the continuing openness and capacity for development of the public examinations system. Second, the delivery of special education provision is to be reformed and enhanced through the establishment of a Special Education Council, which will have responsibility for the delivery and development of services to students with disabilities. Third, local offices are to be established in the principal regional centres in order to provide an integrated access to a range of educational services in their area. For further information see www.education.ie

ITALY

Italy is a parliamentary republic, a partly decentralised system. Education policy making is shared between the national government (which has responsibility for funding, school curricula, and quality control) and the Regions (responsible for education delivery, in particular for vocational education and training) (see www.istruzione.it). During 2002, public debate was focused on the proposed major reform of the education system. The legislation, which was passed by Parliament early 2003, affects the structure of schooling, increases the autonomy of the individual schools, and decentralises political and administrative decision making to the regional level (see www.istruzione.it/mpi/progettoscuola). The law extends the right to education and vocational training up to the age of 18 years. There will be two education cycles: the first cycle comprises primary school (5 years) and lower secondary school (3 years); the second cycle provides two options: the “Liceo”, or general education (5 years), with direct access to university, and the system of vocational education and training (4 years) that awards a vocational qualification and allows, with a supplementary one-year course, for enrolment in university. Parallel to this legislation, a National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System was established, and it started in 2002 with a national survey aimed at developing instruments for the regular assessment of the effectiveness of educational provision and the quality of its outputs. See www.invalsi.it

JAPAN

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has overall responsibility for education. MEXT offers guidance, advice and assistance to the prefectural and municipal boards of education which also carry out their respective allotted roles (see www.mext.go.jp/english/org/struct/govern). To support implementation of the New Course of Study, MEXT presented policies in a White Paper under the theme “Exhortation toward Learning” in 2002, and has been working on various measures to support school activities, in order to help children acquire basic knowledge and skills, think by themselves, judge and act independently, and develop their academic ability, including problem-solving ability. In response to changing expectations and demands concerning higher education, there have been substantial reforms to make universities’ systems more simplified and flexible. Deliberations of the Central Council for Education have contributed to the higher education reforms. Based on the Policies for the Structural Reform of Universities (National Universities), presented by MEXT in June 2001, the following changes are

now being implemented: reorganisation and merging of national universities; development of a more independent legal status and greater autonomy for national universities; and introduction of the principles of competition by using third party evaluations (see www.mext.go.jp/eky2001/index-24.html).

KOREA

The Republic of Korea has a decentralised political system. Education policy making is shared between the national government (which has responsibility for higher education, lifelong education, and national human resources development policies) and the provinces (responsible for primary and secondary education) (see “Education in Korea” at www.moe.go.kr/English). Current government priorities at school level focus on improving the basic skills for students that will enable them to function as responsible members of society. Class sizes will be reduced to 30 or less by 2008, and education for all five-year-olds will be provided free of charge by 2006. The “Comprehensive Measures to Develop Education in the Rural Areas” and the “Education Welfare Investment Priority Zone Project” will be implemented to bridge the gaps in educational quality between regions and social classes. In higher education the focus is on lifting quality so that students have world-class qualifications. New investments are planned in graduate schools and research institutes. Restructuring of university education will also take place, and poor performing institutions may be closed. A new project is being implemented to reduce the gap between higher education in Seoul and other regions, and to develop regional universities as centres of regional innovation (see “Brain Korea 21” at www.moe.go.kr/English). The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is focusing human resources development policies on national strategic areas such as information technology and biotechnology, finance and the law (see “HRD Strategies” at www.moe.go.kr/English).

NETHERLANDS

The Dutch education system is in general a centralised system. This centralisation is balanced by the “freedom of education”: the constitutional right to found schools in accordance with one’s own religious or life principles and to have these schools financed by government (see www.minocw.nl/english_oud/edusyst/). Increasing the autonomy of schools and institutions by deregulation has been a leading motive in education policy over the years. In some cases the responsibility of local municipalities has been increased (for example, in housing and programmes for the educationally disadvantaged). The main goal is to enable schools and other educational institutions to differentiate, so they can cater more adequately for individual needs. At the same time, accountability requirements are being strengthened, *e.g.* through the enhanced role of the independent Inspectorate of Education since 2002 (see www.minocw.nl/english_oud/guaran/). In 2005, primary education will be the last education sector to switch to a “lump-sum” based budgeting system. Policies targeted at reducing teacher shortages are focusing on a more proactive school role in human resources management, and substantial increases in teachers’ salaries. New and shorter paths to the teaching profession are being created (see www.minocw.nl/arbeidsmarkt/babo90/). In vocational education, creating continuous learning pathways is the major issue in order to raise quality and decrease the number of early-school leavers (see www.minocw.nl/english_oud/bve/site/). In higher education, internationalisation is the crucial issue. As a result of the Bologna declaration, universities and institutions for higher vocational education are implementing the Bachelor/Master structure. Accreditation procedures in Dutch higher education are also being introduced (see www.nao-ho.nl).

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand’s education policy making is made at the national level, but individual institutions have local management autonomy (see www.minedu.govt.nz). In 2002 a ten-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Pathways to the Future, *Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, was released. At the plan’s core are three goals: increase participation in early childhood education services; improve the quality of services; and promote collaborative relationships (see www.minedu.govt.nz). Tertiary education participation has expanded rapidly over the past decade. The Tertiary Education Strategy 2002-2007 sets out a five-year approach for a more collaborative and co-operative tertiary system, contributing to national goals and more closely connected to enterprises and local communities. At least once every three years a Statement of Education Priorities (STEP) is to be published setting out the short- to medium-term priorities. A new entity, the Tertiary Education Commission was established with responsibility for implementation of government policy in the tertiary area [see www.minedu.govt.nz (Tertiary Education Reforms)]. At the beginning of 2002, Specialist

Education services, previously a separate crown entity providing services for students with special education needs, was integrated with the Ministry of Education [see www.minedu.govt.nz (Special Education)]. In 2002 the new standards-based national school qualifications system, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), was introduced (see www.ncea.govt.nz).

NORWAY

Education supervision in Norway is exercised by municipal authorities (compulsory education), county authorities (upper secondary education), and the Ministry of Education and Research (tertiary education). The Ministry has the ultimate responsibility for supervision of education (except for pre-school provision) (see www.dep.no/archive/ufdvedlegg/01/04/utdan021.pdf). In 2002-2003 higher education – both private and public – is being reformed (termed the Quality Reform) (see www.dep.no/archive/ufdvedlegg/01/02/thequ067.pdf). The main elements are greater autonomy for institutions, a more result-oriented funding formula, the establishment of a new independent agency for quality assurance (see www.nokut.no), and increased international co-operation. Academic courses will now be more structured, with regular guidance and monitoring of each student. A new structure with Bachelor/Master/PhD degrees is being introduced, in line with the Bologna process. In parallel to this reform the system of financial support to students has been improved. Ongoing reforms in primary and secondary education aim to improve quality by giving more autonomy to schools, and by securing more knowledge and openness regarding educational outcomes. Reforms include developing a national system for quality evaluation and development; establishing a new system for financing independent/private schools; simplifying rules and regulations; and re-organising the national education administration. The school reforms will be principally implemented during 2003-2005.

PORTUGAL

Portugal is a unitary political system where the administration of education is largely centralised, with the major exception of the autonomous regions of the Madeira and Açores. In April 2002 a new Government was elected, and the main goal of its educational programme is “To invest in the qualification of the Portuguese people” (see www.min-edu.pt). The sector corresponding to higher education has been integrated in the Ministry for Science and Higher Education (see www.mces.gov.pt). Legislation on the development and quality assurance of higher education has been introduced. The Ministry of Education has been reorganised. A key element has been the creation of the new Directorate-General for Vocational Training, with the aim of integrating the lifelong education and training policies and systems. In 2002 legislation on the Evaluation System for Non-Higher Education was introduced to promote school self-evaluation and external evaluation. To strengthen the decentralisation of educational responsibility to the local level a new law concerning the Educational Municipal Councils and the Educational Charter has also been adopted.

SPAIN

Spain is a state, politically and administratively, structured in Regional Governments. The Regional Governments have responsibility for education. As such, it is difficult to provide a short summary of major education policy developments. However, Constitution provides that the State has the authority to establish the broad structure of the education system and the basic common curricula. Substantial reforms in these areas have been underway since 2000. In 2002 two key pieces of legislation were passed, which are being implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports: the Act on Qualifications and Vocational Training; and the Act on Quality in Education. These Acts aim at modernising the education and training systems, lifting quality, and introducing greater flexibility and responsiveness to social and economic change. For further information see www.mecd.es

UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch as head of State. There is no one educational system in the United Kingdom, and there are important differences in curricula and examinations between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has responsibility for early years and childcare, schools and lifelong learning in England (see www.dfes.gov.uk). For 2003 the Government highlighted three areas of focus: truancy; secondary reform; and a review of higher

education. The 2003 DfES document, *A New Specialist System: Transforming Secondary Education*, sets out the main themes for reforming secondary education (see www.teachernet.gov.uk/makingadiff). In early 2003, the Government also published *14-19: opportunity and excellence* setting out the vision to transform the learning experience for young people, so that they are more motivated and have a commitment to continued learning, whether in school, college or the labour force (see www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19greenpaper). A 2003 strategy document, *The Future of Higher Education*, sets out the 10-year vision for development of higher education (see www.dfes.gov.uk/highereducation/hestrategy). National priorities for higher education in the next decade in Scotland are documented in *The Higher Education Review Phase 2: A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland* (see www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/lifelong/herp2-00.asp).

UNITED STATES

The United States has a federal political system. Education policy making is shared between the federal government (which provides general policy guidance, support for special programmes and research, and enforcement of equal access laws), the States (which regulate the schools) and local school districts (which operate the schools) (see www.ed.gov/NLE/USNEI/us-inst-geninfo). Enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in early 2002 was a major step to strengthen primary and secondary schools. This law makes federal funding to States contingent on the States' requiring their local school districts to: undertake annual testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades three to eight; make available public information about how well students achieve; assure improvement in student achievement for all groups; give parents options to remove their children from schools that do not improve; strengthen early reading programmes; and tap new sources of talented teachers through recruitment incentives, loan forgiveness and tax relief for teachers (see www.ed.gov). Improving early reading programmes is a special priority. This effort aims to raise the calibre and quality of classroom instruction; base instruction on scientifically proven methods; and provide professional training for educators in reading instruction (see www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese).