
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.