

Conference Programme

Lancaster House, London

8 February

12.00: Arrival and Registration

12.00 - 1.15: Buffet lunch

Move to Long Gallery

Introductions

1.30: Welcome by Secretary of State and Donald Johnston

1.45: Links to Washington Conference: Ray Marshall

2.15: Findings of the OECD transition review: Tom Alexander

2.30: Session 1: Essential features of effective transition and integration policies

4.00: Tea

4.30: Session 2: Improving levels of achievement for young people aged 15+: prevention in schools and interaction with the labour market; links between general and vocational education and training; work-based training

6.15: Close of discussions

6.30: Leave by coach for FCO for reception and dinner in the Locarno Suite.

Hosted by Mr Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment

7.00: Reception

8.00: Dinner. Short presentations by BIAC & TUAC

10.00: Close

9 February

8.45: Coffee in State Drawing Room

9.15: Session 3: Active labour market policies and programmes (ALMPs)

11.00: Coffee

11.30: Session 4: Policy coherence for social inclusion

1.15: Lunch

Ministers in State Dining Room, short summing up by Secretary of State

Officials lunch in State Drawing Room

2.30: Close

OECD MINISTERS CONFERENCE ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Lancaster House, London, 8-9 February 2000

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

The purpose of the conference is to have an informal but focused policy discussion among Ministers on what works best in policies on transition from full-time education to the labour market for young people in the context of preparation for successful working life and lifelong learning. Discussions will focus on specific policy areas relating to young people from age 15 to allow Ministers to exchange examples of good practice and in particular to consider new and emerging policy directions or initiatives.

The London conference follows on from the conference "Preparing Youth for the 21st Century" held in Washington D.C on 23-24 February 1999. It will also be informed by the findings of the OECD thematic review on transition from school to working life.

The attached note proposes issues for discussion by Ministers under each session.

All sessions will be held in plenary

Interpretation will be provided in English, French and German

SESSION 1: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION SYSTEMS

1. Stable and sustained economic and employment growth is a key underlying condition for an effective transition system. But in itself this is not sufficient.
2. Recent OECD work¹ identifies the following list of key features of effective transition systems:
 - **Youth-friendly labour markets.** They are characterised by: (i) ample training places within enterprises; (ii) widespread opportunities for students to be employed part-time or during vacations; and (iii) limited barriers to new labour market entrants.
 - **Well-organised pathways.** They connect initial education's qualifications with jobs and further education so that young people's skills are well understood and valued by potential employers and society.
 - **Workplace experience combined with education.** This serves to establish good links between students and local employers and improves skill development by making learning more applied. Apprenticeship is the best known form of such a pathway. Others include school-organised workplace experience, as in co-operative education and the part-time jobs held by students.
 - **Tightly-knit safety nets.** They pay attention to the needs of at-risk students, and quickly pick up and reinsert dropouts. They require education, employment and welfare policies to be co-ordinated in ways that increase incentives for active participation in education, training and employment. They require close individual follow-up and support through local delivery mechanisms to co-ordinate services across several policy domains and levels of government.
 - **Good career information and guidance.** This aims to achieve universal access to high-quality information and guidance at an affordable cost.
 - **Effective institutions and policy processes.** They involve key stakeholders in policy design, and in on-going management of transition frameworks. Partnerships at national and local levels are important. Effective policy processes include pilot projects, learning from local initiatives and monitoring and evaluation as integral parts of policy implementation.
3. Countries face different challenges in seeking to meld these features into a coherent package. The key features can work in different ways and in different circumstances under the influence of national cultures, traditions and institutions. Some of them are difficult to transplant across national borders without modification to key labour market institutions and education systems, *e.g.*, the existence of strong employer organisations and trade unions and their institutionalised involvement in the functioning of training systems and youth labour markets. Others such as different forms of school-enterprise co-operation, information and guidance services and safety-net policies appear to be less closely dependent upon the nature of national institutions.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *Which key features of successful transition policies are the most important ones in particular national settings? Where can policy intervention be most effective?*
- *What are the main barriers to effective transition policies and how can successful innovations be applied more widely within any one country?*
- *How can countries learn from other countries' successful transition policies?*

1. For details, see OECD (1999), *Preparing Youth for the 21st Century: The Transition from Education to the Labour Market*, Paris; OECD (2000), *Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life: Final Comparative Report* (forthcoming).

SESSION 2: IMPROVING LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15+

4. Knowledge-based economies and societies require all young people to acquire solid skills and competences for lifelong learning, together with entry qualifications that are valued in the labour market. Significant increases in educational participation by youths have been achieved in almost all OECD countries in recent years. However, low student motivation, high drop-out or non-completion rates and insufficient literacy and numeracy levels are still of considerable concern in many countries. Faced with these concerns, the challenges for schools are to:

- Improve young people's motivation and interest in learning;
- Deepen the qualifications base by allowing all young people to achieve at least upper secondary-level qualifications that lay a basis for work and lifelong learning; and
- Respond to the growing diversity of student profiles and needs in upper secondary education and training.

5. There are a variety of strategies being used to respond to these challenges. Broader and more diverse teaching and learning methods -- active and applied learning, project work and the like -- are one such strategy. A stronger focus upon generic skills such as problem-solving, team work, communication and self-management is another. Others include fewer and broader fields of vocational education and training; increasing the general education content in vocational education programmes; and an increased emphasis on vocational preparation in general education, particularly in countries where general education pathways dominate. In some countries, pathways leading to both general education qualifications and to skilled-worker or technician-level qualifications are being developed.

6. There are, however, barriers in the way of addressing these challenges: pathways that are too rigid; programmes too dominated by traditional examination procedures; school timetables that make multi-disciplinary learning as well as work- and community-based learning difficult to organise; teachers who do not have the appropriate skills and working conditions; outdated guidance and information services that are not connected sufficiently to changing local and national labour markets; and inadequate national and local partnerships between schools and key employer and community stakeholders.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *What needs to be done to improve the motivation to learn, to meet the growing diversity of learner needs, and to improve completion rates? How can all young people benefit from access to applied learning and from work experience?*
- *How can countries ensure that all young people are well prepared for both work and further learning? To what extent can access to tertiary study be strengthened through combined or double-qualifying general and vocational education and training pathways?*
- *What should be the role of information and guidance services in more open-ended and flexible education systems? What needs to be changed so that such services can be provided effectively to all young people?*

SESSION 3: ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

7. Much optimism was expressed in the past that well-designed and targeted active labour market policies (ALMPs) could do much to help young people get a firm foothold in the labour market. Today, we are much more sanguine about the prospects of developing cost-effective measures, especially for disadvantaged youths. Very few preventive, remedial or employment-insertion programmes aimed at such young people -- training, job-search assistance, recruitment subsidies, direct employment programmes or self-employment schemes -- have resulted in either short or longer-term gains in employment, earnings or employability for participants. However, this disappointing record does not mean that we should give up on this front.

8. Indeed, some ALMPs have worked for disadvantaged youths and the Washington Conference drew a number of lessons for success. ALMPs targeted to disadvantaged youths are more likely to work if they:

- Collaborate with local employers to improve the quality of the job;
- Pay close attention to the pedagogy of what is being taught;
- Provide ladders to further learning;
- Address related needs of participants such as childcare and counselling;
- Are rigorously evaluated to enhance their effectiveness.

9. At the same time, countries have not become disheartened about investing in ALMPs for young people. Several countries (e.g. France, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) have recently embarked on ambitious new youth programmes. These programmes share some common characteristics: they are very often large scale; they are usually targeted to disadvantaged youths; and they often rest on a “carrot-and-stick” approach, offering a wide range of education, training and job opportunities for youths combined with the sanction of withdrawing their unemployment benefits if they do not co-operate. While rigorous evaluations of these recent initiatives are not available yet, it will be very important to ensure that they are undertaken and the lessons publicised widely.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *Are there grounds for optimism that recent major initiatives to help disadvantaged youths will be more successful than past efforts?*
- *What are the merits of strategies which combine “carrots and sticks”? What is the right balance between active intervention and sanctions? In what ways does the balance differ between countries and what can be learned from these differences?*
- *Is there a potential conflict between offering education, training and work opportunities and encouraging young people to search more actively and effectively for work?*

SESSION 4: POLICY COHERENCE FOR THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTHS

10. Ensuring social inclusion requires a package of measures, especially education, employment, social, family and tax policies. The risk of social *exclusion* is particularly high for those youths who suffer from multiple disadvantages, *e.g.* they come from unstable family backgrounds, perform poorly in school, often dropping out early, they live in communities with high unemployment, sometimes with an over-representation of ethnic minorities. The evidence suggests that *early* and *sustained interventions* covering a number of policy areas can alleviate some of these disadvantages. They need to involve not only the young people themselves, but also a wide range of other key actors such as their families, communities, teachers and social workers.

11. This inevitably requires policy coherence, but prevailing practice reveals many gaps in coherence. Improved co-operation is needed between government at central, regional and local levels, and between public and private actors. A key issue relates to the extent to which the involvement of stakeholders should go beyond the stages of policy conceptualisation and design to cover monitoring of the implementation of the programmes. One lesson that has been learned is that integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms are essential. It then becomes a question of reaching out effectively to disadvantaged youths, many of whom fall outside systems of social protection and have little connection with formal institutions.

12. Good practice can be found in the safety nets which exist in the Nordic countries. One example is the Danish safety net for teenagers. It provides that each municipality is legally obliged to ensure the follow-up by social workers of their youth guidance service for all young people under the age of 20 who drop out of education without obtaining a qualification. The social workers are responsible for co-ordinating education, labour market and welfare measures in order to develop a personal action plan with each at-risk teenager. If young people refuse help, they are reported to the municipality and their eligibility for income support could be affected.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *Is there agreement among Ministers that an approach of early and sustained intervention can ensure social inclusion for disadvantaged young people? Are there examples of “best practice” in this area, particularly on how to reach out effectively to this group and what to offer?*
- *Are there any lessons which can be drawn about the importance of integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms?*
- *How important is the involvement of public authorities, employers, trade unions, local communities, and other actors and stakeholders to ensure greater coherence? What sort of arrangements are needed to bring them together in a sustained and effective manner?*