

**OECD Centres**

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Berlin (49-30) 288 8353

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## **Meeting of the OECD Education Ministers**

**Paris, 3-4 April 2001**

### **Investing in Competencies for All**

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**OECD Media Relations**

**General Inquiries:** Tel. (33) 1 45 24 97 00 - Fax. (33) 1 45 24 80 03/94 37 - **Research & Documentation:** Tel. (33) 1 45 24 80 88/80 89  
**www.oecd.org/media** · **E-mail:** [news.contact@oecd.org](mailto:news.contact@oecd.org)

**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development**, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France · Tel. (33) 1 45 24 82 00 - Fax. (33) 1 45 24 85 00  
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MEETING OF THE OECD EDUCATION MINISTERS<sup>1</sup>  
Paris, 3-4 April 2001

INVESTING IN COMPETENCIES FOR ALL

COMMUNIQUÉ

*Competence building for all is essential in a knowledge-based society.*

1. Sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the competencies of all of our population -- with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. It is our goal to foster the acquisition of these competencies, but we cannot achieve it alone. We must work closely with others, for example government colleagues, non-government organisations, trade unions, employers and others in the private sector to ensure greater co-ordination among education, social, economic and other policies.

*In 1996, OECD Ministers adopted the goal of lifelong learning for all, ...*

2. As the transition to knowledge-based societies has accelerated, the need for higher level competencies for all has strengthened. In 1996, OECD Ministers for Education saw these needs emerging and adopted the common goal of *lifelong learning for all*. With it, they signalled two things. One was that the development of individual competencies continues after entry into the work force. The other was that inequitable access to initial education not only adversely affects employment, earnings and social engagement but is also mirrored in subsequent learning opportunities. These opportunities need to be more widely and fairly distributed.

*on which we now build.*

3. Now we have met to review progress since 1996 in developing and implementing policies to make lifelong learning a reality for all and to set new priorities for further work.

**A review of progress on the lifelong learning agenda**

*The lifelong learning perspective has proved helpful for policy development for ...*

4. A lifelong perspective has encouraged us to review the entire spectrum of learning: from the pre-school years, through primary and secondary schooling and tertiary education to adult learning. This view places competencies in a more coherent perspective and it focuses more clearly on the learner, and the possibility of individuals engaging in learning, regardless of age, place or even time. It encourages us to set higher expectations for all: to build strong foundations for learning; and to continue building on them, in part by developing people's motivation and competence to manage their own learning.

*early childhood*

5. In the early childhood years, our countries have different traditions and different styles of provision, but we are agreed that policies must support the

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Edelgard Bulmahn, Minister of Education and Research, Germany. The Vice-Chairs were Dr. Han Wan-Sang, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Education and Human Resources Development, Korea and Ms. Margrethe Vestager, Minister of Education, Denmark. It was preceded by a consultation with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee and the Trade Union Advisory Committee and a Forum on Information and Communication Technology and Education.

*education and care, ...* positive development of all children to ensure a solid foundation for future development. Education ministries have a stake in ensuring that children have experiences that promote their development and learning. For this to happen, governments must seek to ensure that all policies concerned with young children and families are coherent.

*schooling, ...* 6. Our schools face many and varied demands to change. The problems of students leaving without adequate basic skills create a demand for a stronger focus on the development of core competencies. Problems of anti-social behaviour in schools and society, and more general concerns about loss of social cohesion, create demands for schooling to play a broader social role. Balancing these many demands is difficult. One effective strategy is to link schools more extensively with providers of health and social services, particularly for meeting the needs of students at risk.

*the transition from initial education to working life, and ...* 7. The boundaries between work and education are blurring: periods of training in firms are on the increase; many students in upper secondary and tertiary education now mix education and work; and many workplaces find themselves under pressure to provide better for learning. The transition to work is also becoming more complex and drawn out. We seek to improve it with stronger links between general and vocational education at the secondary level and between schools and workplaces, with more flexible options in tertiary education, and with improved career information and guidance.

*learning opportunities for adults.* 8. Adults' demands for learning are also increasing in response to pressures, in the workplace and society more generally, for increased competencies. Formal education and training in universities and other institutions have a role in meeting these demands, but so too does informal learning: in the workplace, community and home. This makes the recognition of competencies, however acquired, a growing challenge. Funding is also a key issue. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the present system by means such as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and credit for prior learning is one response. Increased funding is the other response. The public purse is one source of extra funds and especially, in a spirit of developing partnership, we are also seeking to put in place incentives and mechanisms for learners, their families, employers and others to invest.

### **Investing in competencies for all**

*In our discussions, we have reviewed ...* 9. *Investing in competencies for all* has been the principal theme for our meeting since our goal is competencies for all - basic competencies on which other learning depends, and the high-level intellectual and social competencies on which full engagement in the knowledge society depends. Our role is to manage and facilitate investment to achieve this goal.

*the competence demands of the knowledge society, ...* 10. We recognise the increased demand for a wide range of competencies, in addition to basic skills and high levels of education, to participate in the knowledge economy. However, it is not easy to identify with sufficient certainty the new competencies needed. We are determined to work further on this, taking a broad view to include the needs of a knowledge society and not

just those of a knowledge economy.

*the continuing lack of equity in opportunities and outcomes, ...*

11. We have noted that significant inequalities exist in both educational attainment and the acquisition of competencies. We are determined to continue to take vigorous actions in our countries to redress these and to minimise new ones such as a 'digital divide'. This will require setting high expectations for all and meeting them for all.

*the potential of ICT, and ...*

12. We have noted that, while the use of ICT in education and training is expanding rapidly in most of our countries, much remains to be done. The development of teachers' own ICT skills is one need, the development of ICT infrastructure and support and of more effective uses of ICT as an aid to learning are others. We see the potential benefits and are determined to put in place policies which will help all students and teachers reap them.

*options for the future development of schooling.*

13. We have reviewed some of the future development options for our schools. The more optimistic of these could be jeopardised if a serious teacher shortage occurs. We need to explore together strategies to attract and retain high-quality teachers and school principals. We also agreed on the need to set high standards for our schools and to ensure that they have sufficient incentives to meet them.

*We now set an agenda for future work with the OECD, ...*

#### **Challenges ahead**

14. Current OECD work on the determinants of growth and sustainable development reinforces the importance of human and social capital. The challenge for governments now is to maintain growth and social cohesion in ways that are sustainable and to share the benefits equitably. That will, increasingly, depend on effective co-ordination of education and other policies affecting growth and sustainable development.

*urging collaboration with others as well, ...*

15. One result of our discussion over the past two days is an ambitious agenda for future work to be undertaken by the OECD in collaboration with our own government authorities and with the research and policy communities. In this work, we encourage the OECD to co-operate as well with other international organisations, non-government organisations and the private sector.

#### ***Strengthening human and social capital***

*to explore strategies for enhancing human and social capital and their contribution to sustainable economic growth and social development, ...*

16. There is great interest in the potential role of social capital in fostering sustainable development and growth and in its interaction with human capital. Further work is required to show how best education policies can contribute to supporting human and social capital. We invite the OECD to:

- Explore further the relationships between human and social capital and their contributions to human well-being, sustainable development and economic growth;
- Identify policies that strengthen the impact of education and training on

the achievement of economic growth and social development.

***Enhancing the development of competencies throughout life***

***to clarify competencies individuals need and how best to provide for their development, ...***

17. Some of the competencies demanded in the workplace and other areas of life are changing and, as a consequence, some of the objectives of education and training need to change. Access to good information about career development and learning opportunities is essential. Developing individuals' competencies is a shared responsibility. Employers and trade unions have a special responsibility for those at work, governments for the unemployed and those at risk because of structural changes in the economy. Individuals have to take responsibility for their own development as well. We invite the OECD to:

- Clarify the competencies individuals need in the knowledge society and investigate strategies for enhancing their development and recognising their acquisition;
- Identify and evaluate innovative policy options for financing lifelong learning;
- Examine the implications of internationalisation in both the demand for competencies and the supply of education and training services;
- Further develop the work on indicators, with particular priorities being assigned to assessing the preparedness of young people for adult life, examining possibilities for further assessments of adult competencies, and extending the range of indicators with which to monitor progress in achieving the goal of lifelong learning.

***Building our communities***

***to examine ways in which education and training can enhance community life, and***

18. It is vital to enhance the quality of our communities. Some of us are seeing increased discontent among young people reflected in disaffection and anti-social behaviour in our educational institutions. Although many of the causes lie outside the educational institutions, they must be part of the solution because they both reflect and shape their communities. We invite the OECD to:

- Review how education and training systems can increase their capacity to include all learners and to achieve equitable outcomes for all, while meeting the increasing diversity of learners' needs, maintaining cultural diversity and improving quality;
- Examine policies for strengthening the connections between educational institutions and their communities, and for enhancing the ways in which they work together to promote social values and citizenship.

***Reforming teaching and learning***

***to explore ways in which teachers and schools might perform differently and more effectively.***

19. Research and innovation lie at the heart of improvements in teaching and learning. Teachers are central to the endeavour and need to embrace a professional practice that is founded on the production, sharing and use of new knowledge about their work. Their recruitment and professional development are crucial: but there are serious difficulties. Most of our countries face an ageing teaching force, a decline in the status of teaching and serious problems in recruitment. At the same time, there are demands on our institutions to teach in new ways and to fulfil new roles. We invite the OECD to:

- Explore strategies for setting, monitoring and achieving higher standards of student learning for all;
- Explore how governments, educational institutions, local communities and others can collaborate more effectively in the creation, sharing and use of knowledge and in innovation to improve professional practice in teaching and management;
- Investigate options for improving the quality of learning in both formal and informal settings, including consideration of the design of physical facilities and the use of ICT;
- Investigate teacher demand and likely supply, and options for recruitment and professional development.

***Our expectations for the future***

***Our vision is of higher levels of competence, more equitably distributed.***

20. Our shared vision is of increased levels of competence in our populations and of a more equitable distribution of this competence. Our task is to facilitate *investment in competencies for all*. Investment in education and training and other learning opportunities is an investment in the futures of our countries and our peoples. We ask the OECD Secretariat to work with us in bringing an international perspective to the development and analysis of policies to achieve this goal and to the identification of what works in practice.