

**Unclassified**

**EDU(2005)13**

Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques  
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**25-Oct-2005**

**English - Or. English**

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION**

**Cancels & replaces the same document of 20 October 2005**

**CHAIR'S SUMMARY: MEETING OF THE OECD EDUCATION CHIEF EXECUTIVES**

**Copenhagen, 22 to 23 September 2005**

Barry McGaw: Director for Education;  
Email: [barry.mcgaw@oecd.org](mailto:barry.mcgaw@oecd.org);  
Telephone: +33 1 45 24 92 10

**JT00192693**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Purpose, scope and main outcome of the meeting**

1. In view of the preparation of the work programmes of the education bodies for the next biennium (2007-2008), it was agreed to hold a second meeting of education chief executives following the influential first meeting that took place in Dublin, Ireland in March 2003. The Permanent Secretary of the Danish Ministry of Education invited the OECD to hold this meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark.

2. The main objectives of this meeting were to:

- Provide assessment by chief executives of the adequacy with which the OECD had pursued the strategic objectives that were identified in their first meeting.
- Discuss the policy issues with which countries expect to deal in the following three to five years with a view to shaping the OECD's education work programme for the 2007-2008 biennium.

3. The agenda for the meeting was set through a brief, advance electronic exchange with participants in which they nominated policy issues with which they expected to deal over the next 3-5 years. These issues on the agenda were nominated for discussion by many participants but they were not the only ones that participants regarded as important and likely to engage their attention in the coming years.

4. The issues were grouped under three broad topics to focus the discussions into three sessions:

- Quality, equity and efficiency.
- Lifelong learning and the employment challenge.
- The challenges of globalisation.

In addition, the opening session was devoted to a retrospective of the OECD's work on education since the last meeting of chief executives. The documentation included a full listing of outputs from the work (publications, meetings, conferences, etc) and also a set of 'policy lines' that expressed the broad policies that were supported by the work.

4. For the sessions dealing with policy issues, discussion was oriented with a 3-5 minute opening comment by one of the participants who identified policy dilemmas that would need to be resolved in dealing with the issue under discussion. Essentially, they identified what they thought they needed to be worrying about not what they were currently doing or proposing to do. This kept the discussion clear of descriptions of national programmes and focused on an exchange of ideas. Participants did not read prepared statements. They interacted over ideas as the discussion developed. Within the time limits, their discussions were necessarily limited so the topics were by no means fully explored but they were explored sufficiently to identify the broad shape of the issues to be addressed. At the end of each session, a second

participant summed up the discussion, seeking to identify potential areas for future international comparative work that would add value to national policy analysis and development.

5. Consultations with the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) were organised in Paris one week before the meeting on the basis of their views of important, emerging policy issues. The results of these consultations were reported to the meeting by the Chair of the Education Committee.

6. The tasks identified by the chief executives as ones that OECD might undertake to bring an international, comparative perspective to bear on the policy issues of concern are enumerated in the Record of Issues Discussed included later in this report.

7. From the discussions, it appears clear that that the six strategic objectives that currently shape the OECD's work on education are still relevant and that, accordingly, the respective 2007-2008 programmes of work of the five OECD education bodies should be structured around these objectives<sup>1</sup>.

8. The OECD Secretariat will bring this report to the attention of the five bodies<sup>2</sup> which oversee the Directorate for Education's work programme. It was agreed that the next step would be for the policy lines to be reviewed by the committee and governing boards and for them to clarify how they could be best used. It was also agreed that these five bodies would take into account this report in developing their work programmes for 2007-2008, making them focused and strategic and building on their specific expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> . It was judged, however, that some of these objectives could be slightly redrafted in order to make them more operation-oriented for the new work programmes.

<sup>2</sup> These are the:

- Education Committee
- Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) Governing Board
- Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) Governing Board
- Programme on Educational Building (PEB) Governing Board
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Governing Board

## RECORD OF THE ISSUES DISCUSSED

### Opening presentation

9. The meeting opened with a welcome speech from Mr Bertel Haarder, Minister of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Denmark. Key points that he made included:

- The contribution of PISA to our understanding of how our educational systems worked was important but that, while hard facts are important for identifying problems, soft facts were more likely to lead us to the solutions. The recent Danish pilot review was a good example of how soft facts could complement hard facts. For example, this had highlighted the problem of transferring research findings into schools and good practice between schools.
- The new teacher's survey and work on assessment of adult competencies should give us important new evidence.
- Vocational education deserves more attention, particularly for those with low academic aspirations. In Denmark, the target for participation in upper secondary education had been increased from 80% to 95% and everyone must learn to read.
- More pathways into work must be found, for example apprenticeships. Skill gaps and skill shortages must be identified, for example in engineering the academic route was being favoured over the technical route with a resulting shortage in qualified engineering practitioners.
- Most OECD countries have developed a strategy for internationalisation of their education systems. The international market for tertiary education is expanding but not all providers seem to be equally responsible. In this context, the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines, with their emphasis on shared responsibility between providers and recipients, were welcome. The Lisbon, Bologna and Copenhagen processes demonstrate how countries can work together while maintaining national identity.

10. Ms Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir, Deputy-Secretary General of the OECD then briefly took the floor to thank the minister and his colleagues for hosting this meeting. The main points of her introduction were:

- A report on the recent OECD ministerial meeting on "Enabling Globalisation", which had emphasised the need to make globalisation sustainable and inclusive, had suggested that education had a key role to play in achieving these objectives.
- Countries could learn not only from sharing good practice but also from bad experiences.
- There were many important issues to grapple with including out-of-school youth, vocational pathways into higher education, who should pay for higher education, the importance of competencies, changing skills sets and ageing.
- While PISA is a very well known OECD program, the rest of OECD's education work deserves to be well-known also.

- The OECD Council and Secretary-General were keen to enhance the relevance of work for members. This meeting could play an important role in ensuring that the OECD 2007-2008 programme of work responded to members' needs.

### **Session 1: Retrospective**

11. Participants began by considering what the OECD has done in the field of education and what has been learnt since the first OECD chief executives' meeting. Participants had been provided with two documents as a basis for this discussion. One was a report outlining the outputs that had been delivered since the first meeting. The second was an attempt by the Secretariat to go beyond outputs to outcomes by identifying 'policy lines' that express the more general conclusions from the work. The Director for Education invited participants to reflect on whether such policy lines are useful. He underlined that they were not meant to be policy prescriptions for countries or formulae to be adopted. Rather they should be seen as a synthesis of the collective findings of work on education which could help provide a framework for the initiation of a policy debate and the development of policy, both in countries and within the OECD, e.g. in other directorates of the OECD which have an interest in education.

12. Participants welcomed the information on the outputs delivered and noted that they did, on the whole, respond to the strategic direction given by the Dublin meeting. Many participants were particularly pleased with the increasing connection of the Directorate for Education's work with that of the OECD Economics Department, in particular the country reviews undertaken by the OECD Economic Development and Review Committee. Several participants characterised this as essential. The importance of understanding and demonstrating the links between education and productivity was emphasised. It was noted that the OECD can promote a whole-of-government view in countries which can help dialogue and understanding between ministries of education and finance. It was suggested that the Directorate for Education build further on this by developing evidence on the economic and non-economic benefits of education, including the development of social capital and social cohesion. Participants discussed the gap that often remained in countries between rhetoric on the importance of education and the relative priority given to education, a gap sometimes evident between the positions of education and finance ministries. Even where evidence already existed on the returns to investment in education, for example, it was disappointing to find that the message is still not always getting across. Those working on education need to provide better evidence of the benefits of investment in education and of particular policies and practices that they introduce.

13. In this context, the policy lines could help. Participants were favourably disposed to their further development but agreed some work needed to be done to sharpen some of them. There was some discussion on how specific and comprehensive they should be, some seeing them as most useful if they were fairly detailed and others arguing for a general framework or orientation matrix for policy development. There was strong agreement that they must be evidence-based and must convey a clear message.

14. It was agreed that the next step would be for the Education Committee and Governing Boards to review the policy lines and to clarify how they could be best used.

### **Session 2: Emerging policy issues**

#### ***Quality, Equity and Efficiency***

15. Following an introduction by the Spanish delegate, participants explored emerging issues relating to raising quality, equity and efficiency in education. The concluding summary was made by the British Delegate. In this discussion, participants:

- Emphasised the need for better links between educational research, policy and practice and for further progress towards making education a knowledge-rich profession in which those responsible for delivering educational services, most notably teachers and school principals, act as partners and have the authority to act, the necessary information to do so, and access to effective support systems to assist them in implementing change. In this context, delegates welcomed the way in which PISA had transformed the international debate on quality and equity in education.
- Underlined the need for the OECD to have PISA further evolve in order to provide better insights into the causes and consequences of educational outcomes as well as issues of efficiency and cost-effectiveness in education, rather than just repeatedly document the levels and distributions of outcomes.
- Proposed that better comparative evidence be sought on effective approaches to governance and the financial aspects of strategies for decentralising educational decision-making and increasing the autonomy of schools over the various institutional operations designed to raise performance levels and encourage responsiveness to local needs. They also suggested giving greater emphasis to the consumer perspective when examining issues of educational quality.
- Underlined the importance of strengthening student motivation and engagement with learning and the need to create more flexible educational pathways as prerequisites to overcoming persistently high drop-out rates at the end of compulsory education and to securing strong foundations for young adults to continue learning beyond school.
- Recognised the growing challenges schools face in dealing effectively with increasing socio-economic diversity, including from migration and underlined the need for the OECD to examine issues of equity in learning opportunities and outcomes in the wider socio-economic context in which schools and communities are situated. In this context, delegates pointed to the need to learn more on how to foster strategies for teaching heterogeneous groups of learners, particularly through individualised learning. Delegates suggested that the OECD develop better comparative evidence on effective learning and teaching strategies, effective school leadership, etc.
- Noted the need to cover the workforce at schools more comprehensively in OECD's statistics and indicators and underlined the need to learn more on how to improve school leadership and organisation in ways that strengthen professional networks and encourage collaborative learning within and between schools.
- Suggested that some of the solutions to equity-related issues would continue to lie outside the formal education systems and would hinge on successful policies and practices in early childhood education, out-of-school learning in its varied forms and the effective involvement of parents in supporting their children's learning.
- Suggested that the OECD examine education policies in the context of other social policies, including the impact that changing student demography would have on the financing of education.

### ***Lifelong Learning and the employment challenge***

16. Following an introduction by the Canadian delegate, participants explored emerging issues relating to lifelong learning and the employment challenge. The concluding summary was made by the Swedish Delegate. Given the focus on the link between lifelong learning and employment, most interventions focused on the adult phase of lifelong learning, but acknowledged the importance of lifelong and life-wide perspectives. In this discussion, participants

- Made reference to all the usual reasons – demographic change; changing technology; demands of the labour market; decline of lifetime jobs; pressures of globalisation on low-skilled employment; migration trends and linguistic diversity; requirements of functioning in the knowledge society; social cohesion; etc. – that make lifelong learning and its connections with employment a pressing issue.
- Emphasised strongly that the social cohesion objective of catering for “fragile groups” should be better taken into account.
- Underlined the importance of targeting specific groups, such as people with low literacy; indigenous populations; immigrants and ethnic minorities requiring linguistic training; young adult drop-outs unprepared for the labour market; and low-skilled adults employed in small firms.
- Identified three sets of policy approaches: (i) systemic approaches; (ii) those primarily dealing with adults; and (iii) those focusing on young school drop-outs or those leaving schools with insufficient skills:
- For systemic approaches:
  - Early childhood education and care should be regarded as a part of the education system.
  - Expressed the need for improving guidance and counselling, developing career pathways and qualifications frameworks, and, in general, emphasising vocational and technical education in the overall structure of an open and transparent education sector without ‘dead-end streets’. The emphasis on vocational education was a dominant theme and one intervention asked whether the current focus on university education is the right one?
  - Suggested that the OECD work on system developments such as qualifications frameworks, recognition and validation of prior learning, in co-operation with the EU and other international bodies where these issues are dealt with.
- For the adult population,
  - Emphasised that, while tailoring programmes to suit their specific needs was a key theme, employed adults with low skills most need more workplace training and greater labour market flexibility.
  - Suggested that the OECD provide more solid evidence on the benefits of adult learning and concrete examples of best practice on workplace training and cost-sharing approaches for financing adult learning to establish what really works in this field.
- For the vulnerable youth population,
  - Emphasised the usefulness of programmes that strengthen links between education and work, and provide more opportunities for young people to deepen, during their initial education, the skills they need to better meet the requirements of the workplace. It was suggested that there would be benefit in anything that made apprenticeships more attractive.
  - Suggested that the OECD examine the role of vocational and technical education (especially innovations in this area) in the broader context of approaches to improve young people’s transition from school to work.

- Suggested that the Education Directorate work more closely with the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, make greater efforts to involve the social partners and consider organising dedicated seminars on good practice in specific topic areas. One topic suggested was how to promote vocational and technical training.

### ***The challenges of globalisation***

17. The theme of globalisation and the internationalisation of education was introduced by the Japanese Delegate. The concluding summary was made by the French Delegate. The discussion addressed four sub-themes: higher education and research, migrants, brain drain/brain gain and multicultural society. In the discussion, participants:

- Underlined the paramount importance for education to prepare students to live in a globalised economy.
- Emphasised the contribution the OECD should make in developing responses to globalisation in education, in co-operation with UNESCO and other international players.

### **Higher education**

- Recognised that all higher education institutions do not have to compete globally and emphasised that those that do need sufficient autonomy to be able to respond flexibly to the challenges of globalisation, there being no single adjustment model that all might adopt.
- Suggested that the OECD analyse the impact of external forces of globalisation, most notably the impact of developments in India and China, on national policies of higher education.
- Emphasised the importance of raising the quality of higher education and suggested accordingly that the OECD continue its work on the improvement of management and governance of higher education institutions and on evaluation and quality assurance and invest in the implementation of the Guidelines on quality assurance in cross-border higher education.

### **Migrants**

- Recognised that, even in countries that have traditionally been homogeneous, migration is increasing heterogeneity and that, for successful integration policies, appropriate education and training policies are required, including teaching migrants the language of the host country.
- Suggested that the OECD look at best practices for integration of migrants, including ways of better articulating government and non-government schools, especially faith-based schools.

### **Brain drain/brain gain**

- Recognised the risk of brain drain posed by students not returning to their home country at the end of their studies abroad but also the possibility of brain gain through returnees and the benefits that would flow from their impact the education and research systems of their country.
- Suggested that the OECD look at best practices aimed at mitigating the risks and optimising the benefits of brain circulation.

### **Multicultural society**

- Underlined the increasing importance of social cohesion in multicultural societies and the need for better policies for promoting it through national education systems, including non governmental institutions.
- Suggested that the OECD contribute to research on the role of education in multicultural societies.

### **Concluding session**

18. In a concluding comment, the Director for Education reflected on ways in which OECD's international comparative work could contribute to national policy development. He:

- Noted that the internationally comparable statistics and indicators provided by OECD's INES programme and PISA establish the current state of affairs in countries and, by identifying best performance and showing what is possible, challenge many countries to raise their performance levels.
- Observed that the important questions for countries are then about how to make a difference:
  - in participation rates by reducing drop-out rates of students during the final years of secondary schooling and increasing participation in vocational education and training and higher education;
  - in performance levels by adopting more effective policies and practices.
- Suggested that countries need to take care that, as they seek new approaches, they share best practice and not just current practice and noted that this:
  - depends crucially on there being a good-evidence base for judgements about whether particular policies and practices are effective;
  - could be facilitated by 'knowledge brokers' – a matter that is currently under investigation by CERI.

19. The Director thanked Mr. Preisler, the Danish Permanent Secretary, Mr. Torben Kornbech Rasmussen, the Chair of the Education Committee and other staff in the Danish Ministry for their generous hospitality and all their support and assistance in the organisation of the meeting.

### **Chair's Summary.**

- The delegates endorsed OECD work in the previous period, and underlined that the six strategic objectives set up in Dublin are still relevant as the foundation for OECD work on education.
- The delegates suggested that the OECD should strive to maintain a balance between quantitative work in terms of statistics, surveys and assessments and qualitative work in terms of analyses and policy reviews.
- The delegates welcomed the increased connection between the Directorate for Education's work with the OECD Economics Department and, while noting the long history of collaboration on

employment issues, recommended that it should work even more closely with the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.

- Delegates found the policy lines very helpful and recommended that they be reviewed by the Education Committee and the Governing Boards of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) and the Programme on Educational Building (PEB).
- As the further work under the six strategic objectives is developed delegates suggested that a few issues need more attention – vocational education and training (VET), globalisation, quality assurance, education's impact on migrants and other vulnerable groups, the use of evidence in teaching and learning and school-leadership, e.g. through the *What Works* studies.
- Finally the OECD was encouraged to further develop the cooperation with other international bodies like the EU and UNESCO.

### **Supporting documents**

20. The following documents supported the discussions:

- Emerging Education Policy Issues in OECD Countries, EDU(2005)7 and addenda (country input).
- Strategic Objectives, Key Issues and Policy Lines, EDU(2005)8.
- Progress and Output Results of the Programme of Work of the Directorate for Education, 2002 to 2006, EDU(2005)9.
- Statement by TUAC, EDU(2005)10.
- Statement by BIAC, EDU(2005)11.

**PARTICIPANTS LIST FOR MEETING OF OECD CHIEF EXECUTIVES FOR EDUCATION**

**Chair**

**Mr. Niels PREISLER**

*Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Education*

**Australia**

**Dr. Wendy JARVIE**

*Deputy Secretary  
Department of Education, Science and Training*

**Mr. William THORN**

*Counsellor  
Australian Delegation to the OECD  
Permanent Delegation*

**Austria**

**Mr. Anton DOBART**

*Director General  
General Education, Educational Planning and  
International Affairs  
Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture*

**Mr. Josef NEUMÜLLER**

*Director  
International Relations  
Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture*

**Belgium**

**M. Dominique BARTHELEMY**

*Directeur, Direction des Relations Internationales  
Secrétariat général  
Ministère de la Communauté française*

**Mr. Gaby HOSTENS**

*Director General for Secondary Education  
Ministry of the Flemish Community*

**M. Etienne GILLIARD**

*Attaché  
Administration générale of de l'éducation et de la  
recherche scientifique  
Ministère de la Communauté française*

**Canada**

**Ms. Rachel BARD**

*Deputy Minister  
Department of Training and Employment Development*

**Mr. Raymond THÉBERGE**

*Director General  
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada*

**Mr. George MOLLOY**

*Director  
International Programs & Special Projects  
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada*

### **Czech Republic**

**Ms. Alena STERBOVA**

*Deputy Minister for European Integration and  
International Relations  
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*

**Mr. Jan KOUCKY**

*Director, Education Policy Centre  
Faculty of Education  
Charles University*

### **Denmark**

**Mr. Bertel HAARDER**

*Minister for Education and for Ecclesiastical Affairs  
Ministry of Education*

**Mr. Uffe Toudal PEDERSEN**

*Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation*

**Mr. Torben Kornbech RASMUSSEN**

*Director  
International Relations Division  
Ministry of Education*

**Mr. Jørn SKOVSGAARD**

*Senior Adviser  
International Relations Division  
Ministry of Education*

**Mme Pernille Skou BROENNER ANDERSEN**

*Head of Section  
International Relations Division*

### **Finland**

**Mr. Markku LINNA**

*Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Education*

**Mr. Jorma AHOLA**

*Counsellor  
Ministry of Education*

## **France**

**M. François DECOSTER**

*Conseiller Diplomatique  
Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enseignement  
supérieur et de la Recherche*

**M. François GORGET**

*Chef du bureau des institutions multilatérales et de la  
francophonie  
Directions des relations internationales et de la  
coopération  
Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enseignement  
supérieur et de la Recherche*

**Mme Nadine PROST**

*Chargée de mission pour l'OCDE,  
Bureau des institutions multilatérales et de la  
francophonie  
Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enseignement  
supérieur et de la Recherche*

## **Germany**

**Mrs. Veronika PAHL**

*Director General  
Vocational Education and Training; Educational Reform  
Federal Ministry for Education & Research (BMBF)*

**Mr. Wolfgang KRAFT**

*Deputy Director General  
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Baden-  
Württemberg*

## **Greece**

**Professor Andreas KARAMANOS**

*Secretary-General  
Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs*

**Professor Dimitris GLAROS**

*President  
Centre for Educational Research*

## **Hungary**

**Mr. Tamás KÖPECZI BÓCZ**

*Deputy State Secretary for International Affairs  
Ministry of Education*

**Dr. Gábor HALÁSZ**

*Director General  
National Institute for Public Education*

## **Iceland**

**Mr. Gudmundur ARNASON**

*Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture*

**Mr. Valur ARNASON**

*Head of Legal Department  
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture*

### **Ireland / Irlande**

**Ms. Brigid MCMANUS**

*Secretary General  
Department of Education and Science*

**Mr. Paddy MCDONAGH**

*Assistant Secretary General  
Department of Education and Science*

### **Italy**

**Mr. Lino LAURI**

*Dirigente superiore  
Direzione Affari Internazionali istruzione scolast  
Ministero Miur, Dipartimento istruzione*

**Mme Aurea MICALI**

*Direttore Generale  
Ministero Istruzione Universita Ricerca*

### **Japan**

**Mr. Masayuki INOUE**

*Director-General for International Affairs  
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and  
Technology (MEXT)*

**Ms. Noriko SUZUKI**

*International Affairs  
MEXT*

**Mr. Tadashi MOCHIZUKI**

*First Secretary  
Permanent Delegation*

### **Korea**

**Mr. Gwang-Jo KIM**

*Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Education and Human Resources  
Development*

**Mr. Min-sik HONG**

*Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation of Korea to the OECD*

**Ms. Pilnam YI**

*Deputy Director  
International Education Co-operation Division  
Ministry of Education and Human Resources  
Development*

### **Luxembourg**

**M. Siggy KOENIG**

*Secrétaire Général  
Coordination générale  
Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Formation  
Professionnelle et des Sports*

**M. Jeannot HANSEN**

*Chef du Service des relations internationales  
Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de la Formation  
Professionnelle et des Sports*

### **Mexico**

**Dr. Leonel ZÚÑIGA MOLINA**

*Head  
Unit for Planning and Evaluation of Educational Policies  
Public Education Secretariat of Mexico (SEP-Mexico)*

**Mrs. Sylvia SCHMELKES DEL VALLE**

*General Coordinator of Intercultural and Bilingual  
Education  
Secretariat of Public Education*

**M. Felipe MARTINEZ RIZO**

*Director General  
Instituto Nacional para la Evaluacion de la Educacion*

### **Netherlands**

**Dr. Rob KERSTENS**

*Director General for Primary and Secondary Education  
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*

### **New Zealand**

**Mr. Howard FANCY**

*Secretary for Education  
Ministry of Education*

### **Norway**

**Mr. Trond FEVOLDEN**

*Secretary General  
Royal Ministry of Education and Research*

**Mr. Jan LEVY**

*Director General  
Ministry of Education and Research*

### **Poland**

**Mr. Jerzy WISNIEWSKI**

*Director  
Department of Educational Strategy and Structural Funds  
Ministry of National Education and Sport*

**Mr. Robert PAWLAK**

*Chief Specialist  
Department of Educational Strategy and Structural Funds  
Ministry of National Education and Sport*

### **Portugal**

**Professor António MORÃO DIAS**

*Director General  
Director General of Higher Education  
Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education*

### **Slovak Republic**

**Mr. Peter MEDERLY**

*Director General for Higher Education Division  
Ministry of Education*

### **Spain**

**M. Alejandro TIANA**

*Secrétaire Général de l'Education  
Ministère de l'Education et de la Science*

### **Sweden**

**Mrs. Agneta KARLSSON**

*State Secretary  
Ministry of Education, Research and Culture*

**Mr. Hans-Åke ÖSTRÖM**

*Director  
Ministry of Education, Research and Culture*

**Mr. Anders FALK**

*Counsellor  
Permanent Delegation*

### **Switzerland**

**Mr. Hans AMBÜHL**

*General Secretary  
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education*

**Danielle MUELLER-KIPFER**

*State Secretariat for Education and Research*

**Ms. Ursula RENOLD**

*Federal Office for Professional Training and Technology*

### **Turkey**

**Professor Necat BIRINCI**

*Undersecretary  
Ministry of National Education*

**Ms. Sükran YILMAZ**

*Education Counsellor  
Turkish Embassy*

### **United Kingdom**

**Sir David NORMINGTON**

*Permanent Secretary  
Department of Education and Skills*

**Mr. Mike EWART**

*Head of Education Department  
Scottish Executive*

**Ms. Marie NIVEN**

*Deputy Director  
International Relations Division  
Department for Education and Skills*

### **United States**

**Mr. Beto GONZALEZ**

*Acting Assistant Secretary  
Office of Vocational and Adult Education  
U.S. Department of Education*

**Ms. April COHEN**

*Education and Public Governance Advisor  
Permanent Delegation*

### **EC**

**Mr. Nickolaus VAN DER PAS**

*Director-General  
Directorate General for Education and Culture  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION*

**Mr. Roger O'KEEFFE**

*Principal Administrator  
Directorate General for Education and Culture, Unit A1  
European Commission*

### **Observers**

#### **Estonia**

**Mr. Riho RAAVE**

*Deputy Secretary for General and Vocational Education  
Ministry of Education and Research*

**Mr. Margus HAIDAK**

*Foreign and Public Relations Department  
Ministry of Education and Research*

#### **Russian Federation**

**Mr. Feodor DUDYREV**

*Deputy Director  
Department on Governmental Policy in Education  
Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian  
Federation*

**Ms. Larisa EFREMOVA**

*Deputy Director  
International Cooperation in Education and Science  
Department  
Ministry of Education and Science*

#### **Slovenia**

**Dr. Zvonko BERGANT**

*Personal adviser to the Minister  
Office for International Cooperation and European Affairs  
Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Technology*

**M. Beno ARNEJCIC**

*Secretary  
Education Development Unit  
Ministry of Education and Sport*

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*Undersecretary  
Department for International Co-operation and EU Affairs  
Ministry of Education and Sport*

#### **Council of Europe**

**Mr. Gabriele MAZZA**

*Director of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education  
Council of Europe*

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