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OECD Study Finds More Freedom for Schools to Decide How They Want to Teach

Decision-making in schools is becoming more decentralised as the education systems of OECD countries move away from centralised command systems based on government edicts and adapt to the flexibility required for the modern knowledge economy, new OECD research shows.

Decisions on how teaching is organised are now mainly taken by schools in all OECD countries, rather than by local, regional or national authorities, according to the 2004 edition of *Education at a Glance*, the OECD's annual compendium of education statistics.

Decisions on planning and structures remain mostly in the hands of more centralised tiers of government, however, while the picture is mixed for decisions on personnel management and the allocation and use of resources. On average, about half of all decisions relating to lower secondary education are now taken by schools, notably higher than the level that prevailed only five years ago, according to *Education at a Glance*.

The trend is significant because it shows how school authorities at local, regional and national level in 17 countries with comparable data are responding to demands for improved efficiency, increased responsiveness to local communities and encouragement of innovation and quality improvement (Table D6.6).

Education at a Glance also provides a comparative assessment of student learning conditions and teacher working conditions. Teachers' salaries have risen in real terms between 1996 and 2002 in virtually all countries, with the largest increases evident in Hungary and Mexico. By contrast, salaries at the primary and upper secondary levels in Spain fell in real terms over the same period (Table D3.3).

Countries have applied salary increases differently between new recruits to teaching and serving teachers. Starting salaries have risen faster than mid-career or top-of-the-scale salaries in Australia, Denmark, England, Finland and Scotland, indicating a desire to attract new teachers into the profession in these countries. However, the reverse is true in Japan and Portugal where the policy focus is more on teacher retention than recruitment (Table D3.3).

Comparisons of teachers' salaries need to be seen in the context of variations in teachers' working and teaching time. The number of hours a teacher is expected to teach at the lower secondary level ranges from 513 hours per year in Japan to 1 167 hours per year in Mexico. Relating these to the statutory salaries of teachers shows salaries per teaching hour to be highest in Japan and Korea (at over US\$ 80 per teaching hour for lower secondary) and lowest in the Slovak Republic (US\$10 per teaching hour). The United States, with high salaries but also high number of teaching hours, has a below average salary to teaching hour ratio of US\$ 38 per teaching hour (Tables D3.1 and D4.1).

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The statistics in ***Education at a Glance*** provide a basis for policy debate and decisions in the world's most developed countries. In planning expenditure on teaching, countries may have to make a choice between paying teachers more but employing fewer of them, resulting in higher student to staff ratios. Other factors also influence this relationship, but OECD figures show teacher salaries in Germany, Japan and Korea to be amongst the highest of OECD countries, whilst the ratios of students to teaching staff in these countries at the same level of education (at 16, 16 and 21 students per teacher respectively) are well above the average reported by countries (Tables D3.1 and D2.2).

Other areas covered by the publication include the financial and human resources invested in education, access to education, participation and progression, instruction time and its allocation across subject areas, the criteria by which students are admitted to schools, class size, as well as student learning conditions.

Education at a Glance 2004 is available to journalists on the OECD's password-protected website (<http://www1.oecd.org/media/journalists/journalists.htm>). For further information, journalists are invited to contact the OECD's Media Relations Division (tel. [33] 1 45 24 97 00 or news.contact@oecd.org).

The tables and charts are available on the website at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2004>