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QUESTION AND ANSWER SYSTEM

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This document presents a new service, proposed on an experimental basis, to answer questions posed by Member countries.

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QUESTION AND ANSWER SYSTEM

1. PUMA regularly receives requests for information and data on existing systems and institutions or on how OECD countries solve certain problems. Most of the time these are specific questions on subjects that PUMA does not necessarily address *per se* in its work or at Committee meetings.
2. Although one of its primary missions is to promote the exchange of information with a view to contributing to more effective public management, PUMA does not have sufficient resources to satisfy all its customers' requests. Although it can provide information on some experiences, it would be too costly for it to undertake specific research on every subject not covered in past or current work.
3. So as better to respond to the requests for information it regularly receives, PUMA proposes to create a "question and answer" system that will make it possible to ensure that requests are followed up and processed and answers provided.

The objective: A new service for the benefit of the Committee and working groups

4. This initiative does not call into question PUMA's shift towards devoting more resources to substantive work and formulating opinions that can be used directly by decision-makers; in particular, there is no intention to replace these priorities with a networking approach that would not be compatible with the OECD's mission. Nor should PUMA try to duplicate the information exchange systems already existing in Member countries. The objective is rather to create a new PUMA service that will make it possible to disseminate information on experiences and data more effectively. This service should be both simple to set up and use as well as being low in cost.
5. In order to ensure that it addresses all the various questions asked and that replies are disseminated satisfactorily, the question and answer system will be fully open to all PUMA customers. Both Committee members and members of the various PUMA working groups (Regulatory Reform, Human Resources, Centre of Government Network) will have access to the system. But to avoid any possible confusion and limit the operating cost of this tool, it will not be open to other types of user, such as academics.

Operating principles

6. PUMA will be responsible for administering the system so that users have full access to questions and answers and so that questions are properly processed. To ensure both efficiency and low cost, the question and answer system will be organised on the basis of the following rules:
 - PUMA will act as the central clearing house for incoming and outgoing information, thus ensuring a unified and consistent system. An electronic address will be created for this purpose and will be supervised by a system administrator.
 - All users will be able to ask questions, and should contact PUMA directly.

- A correspondent will be designated as a “contact point” in each country. PUMA will forward questions to these correspondents, who will co-ordinate the collection of replies. They will then return the response to PUMA, which will disseminate it. They will play an operational role and should be able to ensure co-ordinated data collection.
- Given its central role, which will involve relaying and translating data, PUMA should limit operating costs by requiring replies to be as concise and targeted as possible, without restricting their scope or interest. If some questions call for answers that entail lengthy arguments or include ancillary documents, PUMA may decide not to have them translated. In particular, PUMA will not translate documents drafted in languages other than English and French. Nevertheless, all documents and answers will be disseminated if the country that asked the question wishes to have them translated at its own expense. Answers will be widely disseminated, unless the country correspondent or the country that asked the question requests otherwise. This broad dissemination will make it possible to prevent identical questions being asked a number of times, while providing for confidentiality on certain subjects.

Implementation of the system

7. The suggested procedure for using the system is as follows:
 1. Requests for information will be sent by users (members of the Committee and working groups) to PUMA in French or English, normally via E-mail.
 2. PUMA will then be responsible for rephrasing the request so that it is clearly comprehensible in different cultural contexts, if necessary after obtaining further details and clarification, and will then have it translated into the other official language of the Organisation if so required.
 3. PUMA will send the request in the appropriate language to the contact point in the country/countries concerned by the question. The contact points' role will be to collect replies from the relevant sources within their countries' government and forward them to PUMA before a set date.
 4. The reply will then be translated and forwarded to the author of the question, and if appropriate to all users in the official language of their choice.