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COMMUNIQUE

MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL

HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL

1. The OECD Education Committee met at Ministerial level in Paris on 13th and 14th November 1990. The Chairman was Mr. Javier Solana Madariaga, Minister of Education and Science, Spain. The Vice-chairmen were Mr. Lauro F. Cavazos, Secretary for Education, United States and Mr. Göran Persson, Minister for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education, Sweden.

2. Prior to the meeting, the Ministers had a consultation with the OECD's Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) in a joint meeting. The discussion was held on the basis of a statement prepared jointly by both BIAC and TUAC. Ministers welcomed the constructive contribution which the statement and the discussion made to the preparation for the Ministerial meeting.

3. The Ministers welcomed the opportunity to take stock of progress since they last met at the OECD in November 1984 and to reflect on the issues to be addressed in the decade ahead. They believe the value of the OECD approach to lie in its ability to relate education and training to the broader economic, social, and cultural environments, in its international comparative base -- encompassing industrialized democracies in Europe, N. America, and the Pacific area -- and in the quality of its policy-related analysis. An underlying theme in this approach is that education and training hold an important key to economic and social progress. Recognizing this, Ministers look forward to the results of continued work by the Organisation in the fields of education and training.

4. Ministers discussed*** the main challenges of the 1990s, their priorities in the light of these, and the strategies and options available to meet them. They focused on policies to improve the quality, structure, and flexibility of education and training, emphasizing the urgent need to open access further, to allow all to achieve their full potential and to overcome failure, and to realize lifelong learning. There was a substantial degree of common ground concerning the nature of the challenges ahead and the main orientations for policies, recognising differences of approach, institutional tradition and stages of educational development.

CHALLENGES FOR THE 1990s

5. Ministers recognise that, in the decade ahead, OECD countries will be confronted with new economic, social, and cultural challenges in which knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and exchange will play a central part. The potential contribution of education and training is thus of critical importance; realizing it depends on improving the quality, structure, and flexibility of provision so that it can contribute to change as well as adequately respond to external pressures.

*** Ministerial debate was guided by a discussion paper prepared by the Secretary-General. This was supported by the background report "High Quality Education and Training For All: Analytical Report", the accompanying booklet of tables and charts "Education, Demography and the Labour Market: Illustrative Data" covering selected educational, labour market, demographic, and social indicators, and the full statistical publication on educational trends: Education in OECD Countries, 1990 Special Edition.

6. The "human factor" is fundamental to economic activity, competitiveness and prosperity, whether manifest as knowledge and skills or in the less tangible forms of flexibility, openness to innovation, and entrepreneurial culture. All OECD economies are engaged in a process of structural adjustment and rapid technological development. Employment patterns and workplace processes evolve rapidly. Together, these changes exercise a profound impact on the topography of relevant knowledge and skills and hence on the capacity of individuals, young and old, men and women, to participate in economic life. A growing number of countries report labour and skill shortages, fuelled by demographic downturns for the age groups entering the labour force thus accentuating the burden of immediate change that lies with older adults and the necessity of the recurrent training and retraining of the labour force. But alongside shortages the unemployment problem remains, though at much higher levels in some OECD countries than others. Continuing poverty gives grounds for concern and young people are among those most "at risk". The dangers of socio-economic polarization must be tackled. Education and training have powerful links with production, the labour market, as well as social well-being. The task for policy is to ensure that education and training play their full part in economic and social progress.

7. The coming decade looks set to bring new scale and patterns to international movements of labour and to migration. There are the rapidly developing international skills markets that will themselves be shaped by emerging shortages. The scale of migration calls for close scrutiny of the adequacy of education and training provision to ensure integration for migrants and their children while maintaining their cultural identity. Developments outside the OECD area, in eastern and central Europe, the newly industrialising economies especially those in South East Asia, the poorer and very poor developing countries, all point to far-reaching change -- economic, political, and cultural -- in international relations with important repercussions for OECD countries themselves. Global environmental and health problems call for joint initiatives and action. For all these reasons, the international dimension has become integral to national education and training policies.

8. Today's "information societies" call for citizenries capable of understanding and selecting discerningly from the enormous quantities of information generated from all sources, including the media. The exercise of democracy presupposes a well-educated population, participating fully in political and community affairs. The time available for leisure and cultural pursuits is on the increase, most especially for the growing numbers of older citizens, many of whom now enjoy longer and healthier periods of retirement. Changes in family, community, and social structures give a new importance to the learning of values. Ensuring the very quality of life and the environment is a major challenge for the 1990s and into the 21st century beyond.

9. These changes and challenges make learning pivotal to contemporary progress. Initial education and training systems need to be of such universally high quality that all young people secure the foundation of knowledge, skills, understanding, and values to enable their full participation in meeting these different challenges. To do so, they should acquire the ability to learn and relearn. Widespread and flexible opportunities need then to be available to build on that foundation through education and training,

formal and non-formal, organized recurrently in accordance with the broad aim of lifelong learning. These ambitious aims raise the broad issue of financing of education and training, against the background of continued constraints on public budgets.

POLICY ORIENTATIONS

10. Ministers identified the following aims and orientations as common across the OECD area as a whole, recognizing that specific policy goals and procedures will continue to be shaped by national and cultural circumstances.

- i) • A high quality start to lifelong learning -- the crucial role of initial education and training: Without securing the foundation of advanced knowledge and skills, combined with the appetite and ability to learn afresh, in all youngsters, the other ambitions for education and training will founder. The quality and relevance of initial education and training are thus crucial. They should seek to provide teaching tailored to the needs of all pupils and students, the gifted as well as the under-achiever, in an ethos of high expectations, application, and cooperative learning. Effective schooling cannot be developed in isolation. Early childhood education is important for subsequent success and so schooling should build on the influential pre-school years. Effective schooling should lay the ground and motivation for continued learning afterwards in all post-compulsory and post-secondary settings. Effectiveness is strengthened through close partnerships with parents, the local community, the employment sector, and other policy agencies. All young people should have access to education and training opportunities -- general and vocational -- that provide a solid foundation for adult and working life.
- ii) • Quality and access in a lifelong perspective: Quality provision should be as much a feature of vocational programmes, higher education, enterprise training, and adult education as it is of schooling, which has been the predominant focus for qualitative improvement in many countries to date. Together, these different programmes and settings should constitute a comprehensive array of opportunities to meet the multitude of learning needs of all beyond school age. Provision must be extensive and diverse and access to it widened. Adults require ready and recurrent recourse to programmes that further develop their knowledge and skills, compensating, where necessary, for inadequacies in their initial education, and that allow them to participate actively in today's rapidly changing labour market and society. In this, vocational and higher education as well as the employment sector have a critical role to play. Vocational education and training, in partnership with the employment sector, must enhance the base of relevant knowledge and skills and retrain displaced workers. Higher education is strategically placed to contribute to lifelong learning through the provision of teaching and research, initial and recurrent

education, academic programmes as well as those oriented to wider employment and community needs. The growing and more diverse demands on this sector call for continuing review of its structures, funding and performance.

- iii) • Education "for all" implies priority for the educationally under-served: To extend the benefits of education to all makes economic sense as much as it accords with social and educational equity; countries cannot afford to leave large pools of talent untapped. This implies targeting the provision of education and training to the different groups of under-served students and trainees and ensuring that they are given special attention so as to acquire the qualifications that permit full participation in economic and social life; in this, public policy has an especially important role to play. Those with disabilities should have full access to learning opportunities that stretch their talents and broaden social participation. Minority groups will flourish in learning environments that promote both pluralism and equality of opportunity. There is the continual problem of the socially deprived; for these, education and training can make the difference, most promisingly through integrated strategies and local partnerships with the other economic, labour market, and social policy partners. Under-served adults deserve special attention, particularly those threatened by unemployment and the already jobless, women "returners", middle-aged and older adults, minority workers. For access to be widened so that all may participate on a lifelong basis, different forms of student support and financial entitlements, especially for the disadvantaged student or trainee, should be explored. A universal problem is that those with low initial education attainment levels tend to show little interest in returning to organised learning -- participation by adults continues to be dominated by the already-educated. Measures should be taken to encourage all adults actively to learn throughout their lives.
- iv) • Overcoming illiteracy: The continued existence of illiteracy is unacceptable. This applies to illiteracy in the traditional sense and in the new forms generated by scientific and technological change. A minimum measure of the success of schools is that all students have mastered a degree of literacy to permit them to participate actively in society and the economy. But no matter how well they so succeed, competences erode without opportunities for their continued use and, increasingly, their constant renewal. Post-compulsory and continuing education and training should ensure that literacy skills are maintained and improved. Adult literacy programmes will always have a key role to play, especially in those countries and for those sections of the population suffering high levels of illiteracy. The employment sector, including the workplace, must also shoulder its own responsibilities in ensuring the maintenance of literacy, which is the minimum basis on which the more advanced human resource capacities depend.

- v) • The need for coherence and focus to avoid curriculum overload: The increasingly rapid growth of knowledge and the broadening range of education's clienteles and responsibilities now bring curriculum reform centre stage. The demands on curricula today are imposing: they must incorporate content and methods of learning, knowledge and skills, the transmission of culture and values as well as contemporary change. The widening range of tasks and clienteles call for a rich diversity of offerings and of teaching methods, including the use of new information technologies. They should be so organized as to enhance the learning process and avoid inequalities of prestige between the different tracks and programmes and to discourage biased choices such as those reflected in patterns of male and female participation in the sciences and the humanities. The entrenched distinctions between the 'general' and the 'vocational' blur as all programmes are confronted with the need to develop both theoretical content and relevance to future occupational and educational careers. Diversification of offerings thus accompanies convergence of purpose -- the aim is to develop programmes that meet the talents and interests of all pupils, students, and trainees. To avoid incoherence and overload, the special tasks and missions of each level should be clarified. It calls, in particular, for the review of what to include in the foundation of initial provision and what best should be postponed to subsequent further, higher, and recurrent education and training.
- vi) • Improving the quality and attractiveness of teaching in education and training: Expert, motivated, flexible teaching staff are the most vital component of high quality provision, whether in schools, vocational, further, or higher education, or in other forms of organized learning. The teacher shortages foreseen for many countries in these different settings in the 1990s, that are likely to be exacerbated by the ageing of staff and competition from other job sectors, are thus of the utmost gravity. Improvements in rewards, career opportunities, initial and in-service preparation, status and prestige can all contribute to the aim of attracting high quality recruits, whether these are from higher education, trained but currently inactive, or from other occupational backgrounds. Retaining the most talented practitioners in teaching posts and leadership positions is equally important in promoting effectiveness and avoiding shortages; in this, it is important to ensure that women teachers are able to develop their teaching careers to the full. High levels of commitment and professional performance will be expected from teachers in return.
- vii) • Information and data -- preconditions for sound decision-making: Well-developed information and guidance systems about options and qualifications are required -- for pupils, students, and trainees but also for parents, the employment sector, and the wider community. The potential of information and communications technologies should be further exploited as an important element of such systems. Sound, comprehensive education and training statistics, widely available, are prerequisites of accountability and informed policy debate. At present, they tend to be especially weak in the fields of early

childhood provision, private education (whether publicly subsidised or not), labour market and enterprise training, and adult education. The coverage of data and national classifications should be kept under review so that comparable cross-national statistics and indicators can be constructed, available for the majority of OECD countries.

- viii) • Evaluation and assessment -- identifying progress, diagnosing problems: Evaluation and assessment -- of students, trainees, institutions, and the system as a whole -- should constitute an integral component of policy and practice. Good education and training depends on the evaluation of progress and the identification of shortcomings. It is important that procedures for student assessment should be sensitive to agreed curricular goals and not detract from teaching and learning through the imposition of an unrelated set of procedures. Similarly, procedures for teacher appraisal, where these are implemented, should have the enhancement of professionalism as their foremost objective. Certification, the most public form of student assessment, should provide clear information about the positive accomplishments of students useful to all, including employers, rather than confirm failure. The employment sector in turn should play an active part in the design and updating of qualifications.
- ix) • Research and innovation need further development: In general, the level of investment in R&D in education and training is far lower than in any other sector of comparable size. The potential of educational research as an integral element of improvement remains largely underdeveloped, whether at the national, regional, or local level. Traditional academic research has its own special part to play. More important still, much R&D needs to be grounded in practice, involving staff and institutions, whether individually or collectively, in a constant process of diagnosis, comparison, and analysis. To achieve this, experimentation and innovation should be given strong support.
- x) • Enhancing the international dimension of education and training policies: Increasing interdependence -- political, economic, and cultural -- is a feature of the modern world and raises a number of issues for education and training policies. The rapidly developing international skills markets places a special premium on the acquisition of foreign languages for individuals, enterprises, and countries as a whole; success in this depends critically on education and training systems. The mobility of skills calls for close attention to be given to the cross-national comparability and transferability of qualifications and the possibilities for access and exchange between countries -- for pupils and students but also for teachers and administrators. The comparison of research findings, educational indicators, and practical experience across countries becomes increasingly relevant to policy formulation. The OECD should play a key role in facilitating such comparison and exchange.
- xi) • Financing high quality education and training for all: Realizing high quality education and training for all depends essentially on adequate investment in the education and training of the young and in the

recurrent education and training of adults. Low levels of capital investment in many countries contrast with the ambitious targets and tasks for education and training. Despite the recent attention that efficiency has received, there remains considerable scope for the better deployment and management of resources, including through various forms of institutional management and the appropriate exploitation of information and communications technologies. Buildings and equipment can be used more intensively, especially by the wider community. Change may well require the redeployment of resources, including their redistribution between different levels, programmes, and sectors of education and training. More far-reaching options still may have to be considered during the 1990s as, with burgeoning costs, redeployment by itself may well be insufficient. New approaches to the financing of post-school education and training must be considered in which all the different elements -- public and private, national, regional, and local, individual and institutional as well as the employment sector -- are entered into account.

TOWARDS LEARNING SOCIETIES

11. •Building on the progress already made, the 1990s should be a decade of continuing reappraisal, modernization, and reform, recognizing the scale to which the provision of education and training has grown and the new responsibilities with which they are charged. The challenges of the 21st century will not be met in a spirit of "more of the same". For the reform process to be most effective, the achievements of education and training need positive recognition. Policies and programmes organized by the established education and training authorities should be actively co-ordinated and developed in partnership with all the other sources and agents of learning, particularly at the local level, and this is also recognised in the OECD {New } {Framework for Labour Market Policies}***. This is not solely for governments; the roles and responsibilities -- for the different authorities, the social partners, and individuals -- may need to be redefined. The aim is to encourage all individuals to learn actively and continuously throughout their lives.

*** OECD (1990), {Labour Market Policies for the 1990s}, Paris.

END-OF-TEXT