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The OECD and the world economy

Contribution
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
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1. Introduction

1. The long and well-researched report on the OECD and the world economy by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development deals almost exclusively with the activities of the OECD in the economic field. The organisation's activities are, however, wider than economic.

2. In order to prepare its contribution, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education held an exchange of views with Mr Bernard Hugonnier, Deputy Director of the Directorate for Education, and Mr Iain Gillespie, Head of the Biotechnology Division, Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry, of the OECD in Paris on 21 May 2008, on the activities and work programme of that organisation in the fields of education and science. As the rapporteur was not able to attend the committee meeting, he met Mr Hugonnier and Mr Gillespie at the OECD on 5 June. The contribution is based on these exchanges of views.

2. Education

3. The OECD's work on education focuses on four sectors: statistics and indicators on knowledge and competences; member states' policy reviews, as well as best practices; thematic reviews; and projections of future developments. The work on statistics, which amounted to 20 pages twenty years ago, produces today some 500 pages annually. Work on the knowledge and competences of 15 year olds under the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) started fifteen years ago and collects information on the basis of questionnaires sent to member states and third countries participating in the work of PISA. It is now also looking into the competences of adults, the first results of which should be published in 2013. Policy reviews are made on a country-by-country approach on the basis of information provided by the countries.

4. Until October 2009, the OECD will be working on four priority themes: (1) improving the efficiency of teaching and learning processes, (2) lifelong learning and continuing education, (3) governance reform of educational institutions and (4) equity in education and how it should be measured, that is to say, promoting social mobility and inclusive education.

5. While the theme education and employment was launched by the OECD ten years ago, the organisation only started to work on the new theme of innovation in 2008. It is also carrying out a feasibility study based on another questionnaire dealing with teachers, teacher training and teacher career opportunities. New activities being developed include an equivalent of PISA for higher education, a wide-ranging opinion poll among teachers and work in the field of human capital.

6. Improving the efficiency of learning processes is a necessary step in addressing the current mismatch in adult competences. The quality of governance of an educational institution depends very much on people. Inclusive education should not lead to lowering the level of education. Governance reform work should take account of the fact that quality of governance depends more on leadership than on leaders. Such reform should involve teachers.

7. The work of PISA has led to a wide, controversial and healthy debate in several countries and is at the basis of many reforms in education policies. However, PISA does not measure social skills and competences. PISA is a programme that measures the supply of education. A proposed new programme – PIA – will also measure the demand.

8. OECD statistics show that educational expenditure has increased 38% over the past years, whereas PISA shows that the results of education remained unchanged. Education efficiency is highly variable. While the OECD should be encouraged to pursue its studies on this issue, education authorities in Council of Europe member states should look into the means available to reduce inefficiency and to improve investment in higher education included in the 2008 OECD report "Going for growth".

9. While the Council of Europe sets standards in the field of education, the OECD lets its member states set their own educational standards.

10. The wealth of knowledge and information accumulated by the OECD over the years is either made available through publications – the OECD produces two publications per day – or its website. In addition, some 30 000 delegates attend some 200 OECD committee meetings per year and thus acquire information. Some member countries, however, still do not make full use of this treasure.

11. Among other ideas expressed in the committee meeting was the possible use of music and arts in preparing people for lifelong learning. Music and mathematics share a certain rhythm. In the rapporteur's meeting with the OECD, the idea was advanced of the use of electronic games for education.

3. Science

12. OECD countries produce only 56% of the world's GDP but are responsible for 90% of the world's research and development work. Science and technology policy is very high on the OECD's agenda. For the OECD, science policy means looking at means of generating science and reporting about scientific work. The OECD also analyses the impact and role of science, for instance on human genetic research, global warming, food safety and other global challenges. Science is seen as a cross-sector and cross-departmental subject. The focus is on innovation, but includes also the governance of science.

13. Scientific innovation is important but requires appropriate work at the level of schools and universities. Today, young scientists' job opportunities are fewer (and not as well paid) than those of their parents, who were less educated. The Committee on Culture, Science and Education underlined this problem in its report on student disaffection regarding scientific studies (Doc. 10949).

14. The OECD's intention is not to tell its member states what to do. It cannot develop innovation strategies for all countries. However, all countries agree that innovation is important. OECD member states, which are also EU member states, ensure common standards and objectives, such as the Lisbon Strategy. Innovation serves the purpose of generating more efficiency and growth. A better understanding of the impact of science is needed.

15. The agenda of the OECD's activities in this area was set at the meeting of OECD education ministers, in Paris on 3 and 4 April 2001, on the theme of "Investing in competences for all". "Competences" should be understood as covering knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and the ministers stated in their final communiqué that their aim was to foster the acquisition of these competences by working closely with others.

16. The objectives of the Council of Europe's "Lifelong education for all" and Unesco's "Basic education for all by 2015" appear to single out these two organisations as ideal partners for the OECD in its pursuit of this aim. New employment trends, in particular the increasing need to change jobs several times in a working life, have placed wider importance on education, which should indeed train people for life and not just for specific trades.

17. In 2007, policy interest in science, technology and innovation issues intensified in comparison to previous years. In May, OECD ministers endorsed the development of an OECD Innovation Strategy. The following month the G8 summit called on the OECD to strengthen its focus on international scientific co-operation and to support a new international dialogue on innovation.

4. Conclusions

18. The Committee on Culture, Science and Education feels that this annual debate with the participation of the Secretary-General of the OECD is a worthy exercise, which should be continued, with the participation of all the relevant Assembly committees.

Proposed amendments to the provisional draft resolution

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 8, include a new paragraph:

> *"The enlarged Assembly welcomes the OECD's work on education and encourages the OECD to pursue its studies on the efficiency of teaching and learning processes in order to formulate proposals to reverse the existing trend of increased educational expenditure versus unchanged education results. Improving the efficiency of learning processes is of the essence in order to tackle the current mismatch in adult competences and to ensure the sustainability of adequate lifelong learning and continuing education systems. Within OECD studies on education, specific attention should be dedicated to education and Internet-learning in order to avoid and reduce the ever widening digital and, in consequence, generational education gap. The enlarged Assembly encourages education authorities in Council of Europe member states to look urgently into the available means to reduce inefficiency in their national primary and secondary education systems as well as to increase investment in higher education, as addressed by the 2008 OECD report 'Going for growth."*

In the draft resolution, paragraph 9, at the end of the first sentence, add the following words: "and strongly encourages the OECD also to focus its science studies on the new global challenges such as world food safety, large-scale genetic technology applications and above all the potential dramatic effect of global climate change on the access to basic needs such as food, energy and specifically water".

Reporting committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development (Doc. 11687 prov.).

Committee for contribution: Committee on Culture, Science and Education.

Reference to committee: standing mandate.

Contribution adopted by the committee on 2 September 2008.

See Resolution 1629 (33rd Sitting, 1 October 2008).