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The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010-2011

Contribution[1]
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
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1. Introduction

1. The annual report on "The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010-2011", prepared by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, focuses on the activities of the OECD in the economic field. The activities of this organisation certainly cover a much wider area than the purely economic, which is why other committees of the Parliamentary Assembly also participate in the preparation of this annual report in the form of contributions.

2. In particular, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education addresses the activities of the OECD in the fields of education and science. This year, the OECD's work on data protection has provided a new and relevant area of focus for the committee's interest.

3. The contribution by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education to the report is once again based mainly on material published by the OECD over the last year.

2. Education

4. As the OECD Director for Education states in the annual report, "Education is the ultimate antidote to the crisis. Without continuing investments in education – from preschool to high school and beyond – sustainable economic recovery in a 21st century knowledge society will elude us. By focusing our efforts on how best to foster human and social capital, we aim to help countries lever education policies to power the future". Education is thus a vital concern for the OECD.

5. Key OECD activities in this field focus on statistics and indicators on knowledge and competences, member states' policy reviews, thematic reviews and projections of future developments. The areas of special focus in the field of education are set out below.

2.1. Education indicators

6. The OECD provides statistics, analysis and policy advice for member countries on a wide range of education topics. The indicators published in the OECD's yearly report *Education at a Glance* enable countries to see themselves in the light of other countries' performance. It provides a rich, comparable and up-to-date array of indicators on the performance of education systems and represents a consensus of professional thinking on how to measure the current state of education internationally. The indicators look at who participates in education, how much is spent on it, how education systems operate and the results

1. Reference to committee: Standing mandate. Reporting Committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. See Doc. 12683. Contribution approved by the committee on 3 October 2011.

achieved. The last-named includes indicators on a wide range of outcomes, from comparisons of students' performance in key subject areas to the impact of education on earnings and on adults' chances of employment.

2.1.1. The continuing success of the PISA project

7. The most widely recognised and one of the most long-standing OECD programmes concerning education indicators is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) project, which has carried out assessments of knowledge and competence in all member states over the last fifteen years. As was mentioned in last year's contribution, the OECD is now extending its study to assess the competence of adults (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies – PIAAC), of which the first results are expected in 2013.

8. The project reviews the extent to which students near the end of their compulsory education (usually around the age of 15) have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. In 2009, PISA tested students from OECD member countries on their reading ability. Research shows that reading skills are more reliable predictors of economic and social well-being than the number of years spent in school or in post-formal education.

– *PISA results and social background*

9. PISA results enable the impact of differences in social backgrounds to be measured quite accurately. For instance, a July 2011 publication[2] shows that many socio-economically disadvantaged students excel in PISA. The more hours disadvantaged students, known as resilient students, spend learning science at school, the better equipped they are to close the performance gap with their more advantaged peers. Resilient students are also found to have positive approaches to learning, including an active interest in science and greater self-confidence.

10. However, the evidence in PISA shows that positive approaches to learning tend to improve the performance of advantaged students more than that of disadvantaged young people. From an equity perspective, the PISA results suggest that policies aimed at fostering positive approaches to learning should target disadvantaged students. On average, most resilient students in OECD countries are strong performers, achieving high proficiency levels in the PISA science scale.

– *PISA and grade repetition*

11. Another example of recent conclusions drawn from PISA results[3] is that, in general, school systems that seek to cater to different students' needs by having struggling students repeat grades or by transferring them to other schools do not succeed in producing superior overall results and, in some cases, reinforce socio-economic inequities. Teachers in these systems may have fewer incentives to work with struggling students if they know there is an option of transferring those students to other schools.

12. These school systems need to consider how to create appropriate incentives to ensure that some students are not "discarded" by the system. This indicates that policies used to group students according to their academic potential, interests or behaviour, such as having students repeat grades or transferring students to other schools, can be costly for school systems and are generally not associated with better student performance or more equitable learning opportunities.

2.1.2. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey programme (TALIS)

13. The TALIS programme is the first international survey to focus on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools. TALIS provides important information through comparisons of education systems worldwide. It offers an opportunity for teachers and school principals to give their input into education analysis and policy development in some key policy areas. Country-by-country analysis from TALIS allows countries to identify other countries facing similar challenges and to learn from other policy approaches. The TALIS 2009-2013 will cover over 30 countries or regions, and give participating countries the option to survey teachers in elementary and upper secondary schools.

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2. "Against the Odds: Disadvantaged Students Who Succeed in School", www.oecd.org/document/53/0,3746,en_32252351_32236130_48374005_1_1_1_1,00.html.
3. "Pisa in focus", July 2011 issue, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/58/48363440.pdf.

2.1.3. The OECD Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE)

14. It is interesting to note the importance the OECD attributes through its surveys to the physical learning environment. It is not enough to train teachers to high levels and provide appropriate curricula and equipment; education must take place in suitable surroundings in order to be successful.

15. The CELE promotes the exchange and analysis of policy, research and experience in all matters related to educational building. The planning and design of educational facilities – schools, colleges and universities – has an impact on educational outcomes which is significant but hard to quantify. Building and running those facilities accounts for a substantial part of public educational expenditure in OECD countries. While information and communication technologies have the potential to transform the way in which they are used, CELE has three objectives:

– to improve the quality and suitability of educational buildings;

– to ensure that the best use is made of the resources devoted to planning, building, running and maintaining educational buildings;

– to give early warning of the impact on educational building of trends in education and in society as a whole.

16. The CELE compiles a Compendium of Exemplary Educational Facilities, and publishes online for each building an article showcasing a particularly good example of school or university design. *Designing for Education: Compendium of Exemplary Educational Facilities 2011* will address how the design, fitness for purpose, sustainability, safety, use and management of buildings and grounds contribute to the quality of education, based on studies of 60 educational facilities (out of a total of 166 submissions) from 28 countries.[4]

2.2. Changes in educational needs as assessed by the OECD

2.2.1. The importance of lifelong learning for the future – a new OECD Skills Strategy

17. "Value chains are globalising and changing at a rapid pace, with increased emphasis on knowledge as a driver of value and competitiveness. New skills, competencies and qualifications will be needed, generating enormous adjustment pressures as regards labour markets. We already observe an important change in policy focus from 'life-long employment' to 'life-long employability'. To make this happen, 'lifelong learning' will be one of the most important features in the successful economies of the future. This has great consequences, not only for our education and vocational training systems, but also for other policy domains."[5]

18. The OECD provides advice to countries on the role of knowledge and skills in the structural adjustment process following the crisis, the adaptability of labour markets, global competitiveness, entrepreneurship and innovation policies, and the generation of green jobs. A new OECD Skills Strategy, decided at the OECD's ministerial meeting on 25-26 May 2011, will establish guidelines for mobilising and developing intelligence on national supply chains, from the acquisition and development of skills and competencies to their use in labour markets and societies.

19. This Skills Strategy will seek to help both OECD countries and non-member countries to improve:

– responsiveness, ensuring that education/training providers can adapt to changing demand;

– quality and efficiency in learning provision, ensuring that the right skills are acquired at the right time, in the right place and in the most effective mode;

– flexibility in provision, allowing people to study/train what they want, when they want and how they want;

– transferability of skills, by ensuring that skills gained at school are documented in a commonly accepted and understandable form and skills acquired over the course of the working life are recognised and certified;

– ease of access, for example by reducing barriers to entry, such as institutional rigidities, upfront fees and age restrictions, and by providing a variety of entry and re-entry pathways;

– low costs of re-entry, for example by granting credits for components of learning, and offering modular instruction, credit accumulation and credit transfer systems.

4. www.oecd.org/edu/facilities/compendium.
5. OECD Secretary General, Annual report 2010.

20. The work will focus on helping governments to identify and assess essential skills and factors driving the evolution of the demand for skills; improving the match of demand and supply of skills, ensuring that skills are developed in effective, equitable, efficient and sustainable ways, and building coalitions of governments, the business sector and social investors to find sustainable approaches to financing skills acquisition.

2.2.2. "21st-century learning"

21. The OECD's recent studies and surveys have emphasised the fact that educational requirements are evolving rapidly. There is a growing need for creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making, for new ways of working, including communication and collaboration, and new tools, such as the capacity to exploit the potential of new technologies or to avert their risks. Education today has to equip individuals to cope with a multi-faceted world and be active and engaged citizens.

22. According to the OECD, most countries, except perhaps the Nordic countries, do not provide sufficient incentives for education across disciplines, a precondition for developing the imaginative skills to anticipate and work with rapid changes in employment and social environments.

23. Rather than just learning to read, 21st century literacy is about reading to learn and developing the capacity and motivation to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate knowledge. The OECD's studies show that only a few countries promote such a broad concept of literacy in their instructional practices and assessments.

24. Another changing tradition is for students to learn on their own and be tested at the end of the school year on what they have learned. The more interdependent the world becomes, the more collaborators and orchestrators must step in. Innovation in particular is the outcome of how people mobilise, share and link knowledge.

25. "Value is less and less created vertically through command and control – as in the classic 'teacher instructs student' relationship – but horizontally, by whom you connect and work with, whether online or in person. In other words, we are seeing a shift from a world of stocks, where knowledge is stored up but not exploited, and so depreciates rapidly, to a world of flows, where knowledge is energised and enriched by the power of communication and constant collaboration. This will become the norm. Barriers will continue to fall as skilled people appreciate, and build on, different values, beliefs and cultures."[6]

2.3. Higher education

26. The OECD's Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) brings together higher education institutions and governments to share best practices in facing these challenges through a network of relationships, studies and research. IMHE organises a series of international events on various aspects of institutional management, entitled "What Works" in Higher Education, designed to assist member institutions by reviewing current policy and practice and by disseminating examples of successful innovation.

27. An initiative launched by the OECD in 2010, already referred to in last year's contribution, is the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project, aimed at testing what students in higher education know and can do upon graduation. AHELO will provide data on the relevance and quality of teaching and learning in higher education, using tests that are global and valid across diverse cultures, languages and different types of institutions. AHELO should assist universities in assessing and improving teaching, students in making better choices in selecting educational institutions, and policymakers in ensuring that the considerable amounts spent on higher education are spent well. It should also allow employers to know whether the skills of the graduates entering the job market match their needs. This project is still at the feasibility study stage and tests in the field are being carried out among pilot groups.[7] The Assembly will follow its progress and implementation with interest.

2.3.1. Higher Education in Cities and Regions – For Stronger, Cleaner and Fairer Regions[8]

28. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can play a key role in human capital development and innovation systems and can help their cities and regions become more innovative and globally competitive. The OECD Reviews of Higher Education in Regional and City Development assist local and regional governments and higher education institutions to achieve that objective. Since 2005, OECD/IMHE has reviewed 29 regions in

6. "The high cost of low educational performance", Andreas Schleicher, Lisbon Council meeting, January 2010.
7. See the May 2011 AHELO newsletter, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/63/47932932.pdf.

19 countries. The reviews have been carried out in collaboration with partners such as the World Bank, UNESCO, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and the Lumina Foundation.

29. The conference held in Seville in February 2011 was an example of the OECD's increasingly holistic approach to its studies of the challenges of contemporary societies, pointing to a real need to seek innovative ways to contribute to making cities and regions "stronger, cleaner and fairer". It brought together policymakers and practitioners, public and private bodies concerned with regional development, leaders and managers of HEIs and those responsible for knowledge transfer, regional development and community liaison at HEIs, and highlighted key issues in human capital development and innovation and identified ways of transforming universities.

3. Science and innovation

3.1. Indicators

3.1.1. A new tool, the OECD's "Better Life Index"[9]

30. The OECD assesses how science, technology, innovation and education policies can efficiently contribute to sustainable economic growth and employment creation. It provides policy advice on coping with the challenges arising from developments in new science-based industries, notably biotechnology.

31. In the report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development (see paragraph 35 of the explanatory memorandum), the rapporteur refers to the OECD's new interactive tool, the "Better Life Index", designed to model well-being in member countries through a comparative guide to their performance in 11 areas identified by the OECD as essential to quality of life.

32. The tool again highlights the cross-sectoral trend in how countries policies' contribute to the overall well-being of their populations. One of the 11 "essential topics" used as indicators is education; the OECD underlines here that, according to studies, educated individuals live longer, participate more actively in politics and in the community where they live, commit fewer crimes and rely less on social assistance.

3.1.2. The OECD Science, Technology and Industry (STI) Scoreboard

33. Published every two years in print and on line, the OECD "Science, Technology and Industry (STI) Scoreboard" brings together internationally comparable indicators. Its last edition, issued in 2009, focuses on five key areas: responding to the economic crisis; targeting new growth areas; competing in the world economy; connecting to global research; investing in the knowledge economy.

34. The publication of an "STI Outlook" alternates every year with the OECD's STI Scoreboard, providing a study of countries' performance in science, technology and innovation. The latest edition was published in December 2010.[10] It contains a comparison between OECD member countries whose research and development investment has slowed since the economic downturn, and emerging economies where it continues to rise. The study highlights, *inter alia*, the obvious dangers of the cuts in the budget allocated to tertiary education made in some member states. It also points to what is described as "a 'greening' of national research and innovation strategies", that is, more policy priority given to environmental issues, climate change and energy, as well as to health and quality of life.[11] The study's conclusions emphasise the need for countries to continue stepping up their international collaboration and to achieve the right policy combinations of direct and indirect support for research and development, tax incentives, regional and national co-ordination and adaptation to new developments.

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8. The title of a conference held in Seville in February 2011, www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/regional/conference.
9. www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/.
10. www.oecd.org/document/36/0,3746,en_2649_34273_41546660_1_1_1_1,00.html.
11. See also paragraphs 39 ff of the report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development.

3.2. The OECD and the Internet economy

3.2.1. Internet policy making

35. Building on the 2008 Seoul Declaration on the Future of the Internet Economy, the OECD held a High Level Meeting on "The Internet Economy: Generating Innovation and Growth" in June 2011. The conference highlighted that the strength and dynamism of the Internet depends on its ease of access to high speed networks, openness, and on user confidence. The participants agreed on the following set of principles for "Internet policy making":

– promote and protect the global free flow of information;

– promote the open, distributed and interconnected nature of the Internet;

– promote investment and competition in high speed networks and services;

– promote and enable the cross-border delivery of services;

– encourage multi-stakeholder co-operation in policy development processes;

– foster voluntarily developed codes of conduct;

– develop capacities to bring publicly available, reliable data into the policy-making process;

– ensure transparency, fair process, and accountability;

– strengthen consistency and effectiveness in privacy protection at a global level;

– maximise individual empowerment;

– promote creativity and innovation;

– limit Internet intermediary liability;

– encourage co-operation to promote Internet security;

– give appropriate priority to enforcement efforts.

3.2.2. Data Protection

36. The OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data of 1980[12] are based on the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108). Both instruments are currently being revised in the light of technological developments. This subject of mutual interest to both the OECD and the Council of Europe is addressed in detail in the Assembly report (Doc. 12695) prepared by Ms Andreja Rihter for the Committee on Culture, Science and Education.

4. Conclusion

37. As stated in its previous contributions, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education regards the annual debate with the participation of the Secretary General of the OECD as well as working meetings with OECD representatives as a worthwhile exercise that should be continued. The OECD's fact-based studies and analyses have become essential in understanding the fast-moving developments in all societies throughout Europe and beyond, especially since the economic upheaval of the past two years. Comparisons of policy priorities with non-member states of the Council of Europe help to broaden the outlook on subjects such as education and investment in new technologies.

38. The committee joins the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development in congratulating the OECD on its 50 years of continued relevance. It welcomes the continued relevance of its programmes in the area of education, such as the PISA assessment tool which has effectively measured reading skills of 15-year-olds over the past 15 years, and is soon to be extended to adult groups. It also notes with interest the new assessment projects such as AHELO for higher education outcomes.

12. www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3746,en_2649_34255_1815186_1_1_1_1,00.html.

39. As it is convinced that education should not be seen solely as an economic tool and a means to ensure employment, but also as an individual source of fulfilment, the committee also welcomes the OECD's increasingly cross-sector approach to examining socially enabling factors, demonstrated by the new "Better life index" and its emphasis on the role of higher education in creating "stronger, cleaner, fairer cities".

Proposed contribution

The committee proposes the following amendments to the draft resolution:

– to add the following text (shown in bold) to paragraph 13 of the draft resolution:

"The enlarged Assembly also welcomes the development by the OECD of a new interactive tool ("Better Life Index"), designed to model well-being in OECD countries, which provides a comparative guide to how well countries perform against eleven criteria – such as ***education****, housing, income, safety and health – identified by the OECD as essential to quality of life.* ***The OECD's new "Better Life Index" indeed demonstrates the necessary interplay between these different enabling factors that combine to create more sustainable societies****. The enlarged Assembly hopes that this new tool will help to strike a better balance between social justice and economic competitiveness when formulating economic policies.";*

– to add the following paragraphs to the draft resolution:

"The enlarged Assembly takes note with interest of the new outcomes of the latest PISA studies, in particular the analysis of the positive reactions of disadvantaged students when encouraged to apply themselves to PISA tests and training and the indications showing that repetition of grades and transfer of underperforming students often has a negative effect on overall educational levels.

The enlarged Assembly welcomes the new Skills Strategy decided at the OECD's May 2011 ministerial-level meeting, which emphasises the need to promote life-long learning as a condition for life-long employability. It also shares the general thrust of the OECD's approach to "21st-century learning", emphasising the growing need for creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making, for new ways of working, including communication and collaboration, and new tools, such as the capacity to exploit the potential of new technologies or to avert their risks. The Assembly agrees fully with the need to provide more incentives for education across disciplines and to develop the capacity and motivation to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate knowledge.

Considering the concerted and co-ordinated drafting of the OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data and the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108), the enlarged Assembly invites both organisations to pursue their close co-operation in order to maintain consistency and convergence of the respective frameworks. The OECD is in particular invited to encourage participation of its non-European member states in the modernisation of Convention No. 108 and to promote accession to this instrument. The enlarged Assembly also encourages the further common development of the "global privacy enforcement network".