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Ministers
of Education,
Canada

Conseil des
ministres
de l'Éducation
(Canada)

2013 OECD Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education “Fostering skills and employability through education”

Istanbul, Turkey
October 2–4, 2013



Report of the Canadian Delegation

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1. Introduction

The OECD Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education was hosted by the Ministry of National Education of Turkey, in close cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), under the theme “Fostering skills and employability through education.” The meeting took place from October 2 to 4, 2013, in Istanbul, with attendance from 39 countries, including 26 ministers of education and delegations from OECD and the European Union (EU) (see APPENDIX I for a provisional list of participants).

Turkey’s Minister of National Education, Nabi Avci, opened the meeting by highlighting a number of his ministry’s key initiatives: identifying standards for teachers; providing adult lifelong learning and on-the-job training; and bringing some flexibility to the Turkish education system. The OECD’s Secretary General, Angel Gurría, delivered his opening remarks on “Kick-starting a global skills revolution,” emphasizing that the way of life has changed profoundly and so have the skills needed to participate in an increasingly hyper-connected and knowledge-based society. In his speech, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized education as a key priority for his government.

The two-day meeting was considered one of the most important OECD meetings of 2013. The Informal Meetings of Ministers of Education are held every two or three years. The previous one took place in November 2010, in Paris.

2. Canadian delegation

The Canadian delegation was headed by the Honourable Jeff Johnson, Minister of Education for Alberta, and Chair of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). The delegation also included:

- David McGovern, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Research, Employment and Social Development Canada;
- Thomas Bradley, Chief of Staff to Minister Johnson;
- Marie Lavallée, Policy Analyst, International Relations, Employment and Social Development Canada;
- Antonella Manca-Mangoff, Coordinator, International, CMEC Secretariat; and
- Katerina Sukovski, Coordinator, Education and Literacy, CMEC Secretariat.

3. OECD Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education

a. Briefing session on the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

Ministers received a snapshot of key findings of the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (an activity of PIAAC). These findings help shape economic, education, and social policies; assist in matching supply of and demand for skills; identify the skills of tomorrow and those that are no longer relevant; and help to pinpoint what cognitive and workplace skills are needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper.

Some key observations:

- Even top-performing countries have their share of poor performers.
- There is a significant gap between academic and vocational skills in all countries.
- Socioeconomic background is a major determinant of skills, and there is a large skills gap between non-immigrants and immigrant populations, particularly those who have lived in their new country for five years or less.
- On average, youth perform better than older adults, with the exception of a small number of countries, such as Japan, where the older generation scores higher than younger people.
- More education does not automatically translate into better skills.
- Literacy is a strong predictor of success in adult life.
- Skills will only translate into better economies and socioeconomic outcomes if they are used effectively.
- Demand for high-level skills is increasing.

Overall, ministers were pleased with results, but indicated that there was room for improvement. The US representative signalled that, although their results were not positive, they saw this as an opportunity to emphasize the need for better policies and skills, and in particular, the need for reforms. Norway, with scores above the OECD average, aims to strengthen basic skills and partner with stakeholders and industry. Sweden noted that a high proportion of immigrants in that country were among the lowest performers. The Netherlands was satisfied with its results but emphasized the need to look beyond national borders and to examine policies that are useful. Canada's modular approach was cited as one of the reasons for its positive performance.

b. Breakout Session 1 – “How can the education system develop relevant skills and competencies?” (See APPENDIX II for a list of participants.)

Despite the different experiences and circumstances of each country, ministers agreed that in order for education systems to develop relevant skills, countries needed to strengthen students' foundational skills and resilience. They also discussed the need to provide lifelong learning and second-chance learning opportunities, incentives for retraining, and high-quality career guidance, as well as the need to engage with employers and bring together learning and work opportunities.

In Group B (chaired by the Hon. Mady Delvaux-Stehres, Minister of National Education and Professional Training, Luxembourg), David McGovern highlighted a number of measures taken in the area of skills development in Canada. He spoke of the importance of having flexible education systems that provide pathways for second-chance learning and of informing parents and their children about the outcomes of some of the learning options so as to allow them to make informed decisions.

As lead speaker in Group C (chaired by the Hon. Claudia Schmied, Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Austria), Minister Johnson underscored that our education systems should develop

motivated, resourceful, and resilient citizens; encourage them to be bold; help them embrace leadership; and encourage them to actively seek new opportunities. He noted that in Canada, there is a common understanding of “new” relevant skills, in addition to literacy and numeracy. He emphasized that critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, citizenship, adaptability, resilience, and entrepreneurship are essential skills and qualities. He stressed that the greater the engagement and collaboration with experts, resources, and employers in the broader community, the more relevant the skills will become. He underscored that, with a flexible approach, we can embrace diversity and tap into students’ potential. In such an environment, teachers are motivated and empowered, and both students and teachers embrace a culture of lifelong learning.

c. Briefing session on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Ministers discussed how PISA, a survey that measures 15-year-old students’ abilities in reading, mathematics, and science, has become a solid tool for tracking countries’ advances in quality and equity in education. They also observed that it has become a powerful tool in policy-making, has evolved to embrace technology, and has expanded to test thinking and problem-solving skills.

While the assessment of foundational skills remains essential, ministers discussed how PISA 2015 (and beyond) could be expanded to take into account collaboration, foreign languages, and vocational skills. Minister Johnson highlighted the importance of including entrepreneurial skills as well. He underscored the need to provide students with the skills they need to compete and to ensure that these skills are globally transferable. Ministers also pointed out that cross-sectoral studies are necessary to measuring non-cognitive skills and that PISA alone would not be able to provide such analysis.

Ministers also agreed that more meaningful PISA insights into teaching could help countries develop more informed policies on quality and equity in education. They stressed the need to identify ways to improve teaching and school organization. They also noted the importance of extending the survey cycles to allow time for appropriate analysis and reporting of data. Switzerland expressed concern about the longitudinal comparison in information technology (IT), given the lack of data.

Ministers invited the PISA Governing Board to look at ways to make PISA more flexible and align it with the needs of participating countries.

d. Breakout session 2 – “What can education ministries do to achieve a better match between the supply and demand for skills?” (See APPENDIX III for a list of participants.)

Ministers explored how to achieve a better match between skills supply and demand. They stressed the importance of engaging with employers and the need to work in partnership with the private sector. Increasingly, they noted, employability, income prospects, and return on investments must become factors in decisions related to education funding. The Hon. Jaak Aaviksoo, Minister of Education and Research, Estonia, observed that in Estonia, the

government is starting to direct funding into those postsecondary areas where there is growth. Ministers spoke of timely learning and labour-market information systems as crucial tools to assist them in making informed policy decisions. They also noted the importance of foreign credentials. They indicated that some education systems need reforms that will allow for different pathways. Finally, ministers underscored the change in attitude that needs to take place to give more prominence to vocational training and apprenticeships.

In Group A (chaired by the Hon. Hekia Parata, Minister of Education, New Zealand), Minister Johnson spoke of the imperative to meet today's market needs and have a closer relationship between industry, education, and labour ministers. He mentioned that in Canada, provincial premiers, through the Council of the Federation, have directed ministers of education to increase cooperation among key sectors.

In Group B (chaired by the Hon. Mady Delvaux-Stehres, Minister of National Education and Professional Training, Luxembourg), Mr. McGovern spoke of the context in Canada, with a particular focus on learning and labour-market information tools and the various job-search Web sites available. He highlighted the importance of supporting low-skilled and vulnerable populations, as they face the greatest challenges and are often at a disadvantage in accessing Web services.

4. Main outcomes of the meeting

OECD Secretary General Gurría provided a summary of discussions on the future development of PISA for ministers' approval before he formally closed the meeting. He highlighted that ministers acknowledged PISA's unique nature as a tool for policy-making and that it has become a powerful tool for tracking countries' progress in improving quality and equity in education. He noted that top performers embrace diversity and differentiated instructional practices and genuinely believe that all children can succeed. Mr. Gurría recalled that "in some countries, students are segregated at early ages, reflecting the notion that only some children can achieve world-class standards," remarking that high-performing systems support their teachers and tend to align policies and practices across the entire spectrum of their education system and ensure that they are coherent and consistently implemented.

While recognizing the value of foundational skills in reading, mathematics, and science, Mr. Gurría emphasized the need to "embrace a wider range of globally relevant knowledge and skills that are key to the future success of students and can drive innovation in economies." He observed that to achieve this, better links between PISA and other sources of international and national evidence need to be established and ways found to better integrate PISA with national education standards and evaluation systems. PISA must also be made more flexible and adaptable to the priorities of participating countries and more closely reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders — students, teachers, parents, policy-makers, and the business sector. Mr. Gurría concluded by encouraging the PISA Governing Board to work toward this objective.

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Head of Division, Skills Beyond Schools
Directorate for Education and Skills

Mr. Richard YELLAND
Head of Division, Policy Advice and Implementation
Directorate for Education and Skills

Ms. Jean YIP
Analyst, Policy Advice and Implementation
Directorate for Education and Skills

Mr. Pedro Lenin GARCÍA DE LEÓN
Analyst, Policy Advice and Implementation
Directorate for Education and Skills

Mr. Andrew MACINTYRE
Advisor (Committee Secretariat/Liaison)
Directorate for Education and Skills

Ms. Cassandra DAVIS
Communications Manager
Directorate for Education and Skills

Ms. Eda ÖZBEK
Analyst, Policy Advice and Implementation
Directorate for Education and Skills

Mr. André EYCHENNE
Head of Service, External Relations Service for Security
Executive Directorate

Mr. Michael STEVENSON
Expert

OECD (continued)
OCDE (suite)

Ms. Florence WOJTASINSKI
Assistant, Policy Advice and Implementation
Directorate for Education and Skills

Meeting Facilitator
Modérateur de la
réunion

Mr. Anthony MACKAY
Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Strategic Education, Australia

Break-out session 1

How can the education system develop relevant skills and competencies?

Atelier 06, First floor

Wednesday 2 October 17h00-18h30

Group C (with interpretation English-Turkish)

Chair: Claudia Schmied (Austria)

Lead Speaker: Jeffrey Johnson (Canada)

Participants: Reijo Aholainen (Finland)

Nabî Avci (Turkey)

Brenda Dann-Messier (United States)

Peter Drummond (United Kingdom)

Athanassios Kyriazis (Greece)

Alfredo Llorente (Mexico)

Ketevan Natriashvili (Georgia)

Dainius Pavalkis (Lithuania)

Jernej Pikalo (Slovenia)

Cornelia Quennet-Thielen (Germany)

Ulrika Stuart-Hamilton (Sweden)

José Ignacio Wert (Spain)

Secretariat: Barbara Ischinger

Technical Support: Cassandra Davis

Break-out session 2

What can Education Ministries do to achieve a better match between the supply and demand for skills?

*Atelier 02, First floor
Thursday 3 October 9h30-10h30*

Group A (English)

<i>Chair:</i>	Hekia Parata (New Zealand)
<i>Lead Speaker:</i>	Jaak Aaviksoo (Estonia)
<i>Participants:</i>	Stephan Dorgerloh (Germany)
	Ricardo Evangelista (Chile)
	Jindřich Fryč (Czech Republic)
	Taufik Hanafi (Indonesia)
	Rószta Hoffmann (Hungary)
	Jeffrey Johnson (Canada)
	Athanassios Kyriazis (Greece)
	Alfredo Llorente (Mexico)
	Dainius Pavalkis (Lithuania)
	Remus Priscopie (Romania)
	Ragnhild Setsaas (Norway)
	Jan Trzuszczynski (European Commission)
	Shinichi Yamanaka (Japan)
<i>Secretariat:</i>	Andreas Schleicher
<i>Technical Support:</i>	Eda Özbek