



Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada)

**MEETING OF THE OECD EDUCATION COMMITTEE AT
MINISTERIAL LEVEL**

Athens, Greece
June 27–28, 2006

REPORT OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Head of delegation

Honourable Joan Burke
Chair, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Minister of Education
Newfoundland and Labrador

Deputy head of delegation

Honourable Chris Bentley
Minister of Training, Colleges
and Universities
Ontario

1. Ministers of education from the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) met in Athens, Greece, June 27–28, 2006. Prior to the opening of the plenary sessions, consultations were held with OECD's Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC).
2. The Canadian delegation was led by the Honourable Joan Burke; the deputy head was the Honourable Chris Bentley. A complete list of the members of the Canadian delegation is attached as Appendix I.
3. Documentation related to this meeting is available upon request from the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). A summary of the meeting of OECD education ministers, prepared by the chair of the sessions, Marietta Giannakou, Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, Greece, is attached as Appendix II.
4. The main reference documents for the meetings included the following:
 - Issues for Discussion [EDU/EC/MIN(2006)1/Final]
 - Background Report: [EDU/EC/MIN(2006)2]
 - OECD Work on Education
[<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/40/30470766.pdf>]
 - University Futures methodology and the futures project of the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)
[www.oecd.org/edu/universityfutures]
[www.oecd.org/future/sft]
5. In the morning of Tuesday, June 27, consultations with BIAC and TUAC were led by Bertel Haarder, Minister of Education and for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Denmark.
6. The establishment of formal relations between OECD and representatives of business and industry as well as trade unions dates back to the very creation of OECD when its council adopted, in March 1962, a decision providing for consultations with those international nongovernmental organizations that are most representative of the different sectors of economic life.
7. In line with this decision, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) were officially recognized by OECD as being representative of business and industry and of organized labour, respectively.
8. In the framework of their consultative status with OECD, BIAC and TUAC provide OECD and its member governments with the benefit of comments and recommendations on economic and social issues, based on the experience and concern of their respective members.

9. BIAC's membership includes the industrial and employer organizations in the 30 OECD member countries, therefore representing the interest of members of the international business community in the industrialized world and giving them a chance to shape the development of long-term policies in OECD countries.
10. TUAC's membership is composed of 56 national trade union centres in the 30 OECD countries, representing some 66 million organized workers.
11. The sessions were divided into two parts, with presentations made by BIAC and TUAC on each of the following topics: the purposes, governance, and sustainable provision in higher education; and improving the quality, relevance, and impact of higher education. The sessions were followed by a dialogue with ministers and heads of delegation.
12. The Honourable Joan Burke was invited to lead the discussions following the presentation (a copy of the minister's draft statement, available in English only, is attached as Appendix III). Minister Burke drew upon several examples to illustrate the congruence between the statements made by BIAC and TUAC and some education strategies and initiatives in Canada.
13. As with previous consultations of this type, there was more of a dialogue between BIAC and TUAC representatives than interaction with ministers and heads of delegation. Both BIAC and TUAC emphasized their commitment to higher education. TUAC gave particular emphasis to open access, while BIAC focused on the need for the involvement of industry and the economic sector.
14. In thanking BIAC and TUAC for their input, Minister Haarder commented that ministers need the pressure from the two bodies to ensure changes.
15. In the afternoon of June 27, a forum was held (in two parts) involving a wider audience and civil society: Forum on the Future of Higher Education. The sessions were led by the OECD Director for Education, Barbara Ischinger. Speakers for the first session included Mala Singer, Executive Director, Higher Education Quality Committee, Council on Higher Education, South Africa; Hiroshi Komiyama, President, University of Tokyo, Japan; and Jo Ritzen, President, Maastricht University, Netherlands.
16. Session highlights
 - Dr. Singh raised the issue of the social and political dimensions of higher education, which are often acknowledged but rarely given the same attention as economic dimensions.
 - In consideration of quality assurance proposals, attention needs to be given to such foci as active citizenship, community engagement, and social cohesion.

- A fruitful strategic approach would see a convergence of employment skills with social and political skills.
 - Dr. Komiyama highlighted the explosion of knowledge in all areas and the constant emergence of new hybrid fields of study.
 - He argued that we need to restructure our approaches to knowledge including how we organize higher education, so that we aim for “total education.”
 - Dr. Ritzen argued that there is a need to significantly expand higher education participation, especially through international education programs.
 - Greater mobility can act to increase quality standards, and countries should not be afraid of cultural losses.
 - International education needs more attention and resources.
 - Following these presentations, discussion centred on the importance of strategic approaches. Small changes in regulatory frameworks will have a large impact over time.
 - The need to reduce knowledge compartmentalization was mentioned by several speakers, as was the critical importance of integrating the research and learning missions in higher education.
17. The second session was moderated by Marijk Van der Wende, University of Twente, Netherlands, and included Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, OECD Secretariat, and Sokratis Katsikas, Rector, University of the Aegean, Greece.
18. Session highlights
- A future scenarios development exercise was presented for higher education. It foresaw four distinct scenarios: *higher education inc.*, characterized by an international market orientation; *new public management*, notable for national control of higher education; *servicing local communities*, with emphasis on local control and relevance; and *open networking*, characterized by government control but with many international linkages.
 - These scenarios elicited very wide-ranging discussions. Concerns were raised about how R&D would be funded, how access would be supported, the complementarity of research and teaching, and quality controls.
 - Several participants argued for controls on the influence of private markets on higher education and the need for autonomy of higher education institutions.
 - There was no agreement on whether any of the scenarios was likely or desirable. Several participants disagreed with the premises of the scenarios.
19. The lead speaker for the first plenary session (Wednesday, June 28) was Kenji Kosako, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan. He discussed his country’s initiatives to widen national university autonomy, to

strengthen quality assurance, and to increase the international research competitiveness of its universities.

20. Minister Burke reminded ministers that “postsecondary” includes more than universities (i.e., technical and vocational colleges); we need to position education as a system to drive economic development; full access is the objective; and lifelong learning is an important backdrop for our interests in higher education.
21. Julie Bishop, Minister of Education, Science and Training, Australia, concluded by stressing that higher education has wide-reaching social responsibilities. To fulfil these, nations must carry out three “balancing acts”: funding (between taxpayers and graduates), governance (between autonomy and accountability), and impact (between globalization and local needs).
22. Three parallel thematic group sessions were organized around the following topics:
 - a) Who should pay for higher education?
 - b) Measuring the quality and impact of higher education
 - c) Higher education contribution to research and innovation in a global knowledge economy
23. The lead speaker for the first topic was Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, United Kingdom. Among the issues raised during the discussions were the following:
 - The complex policy dilemmas of higher education funding and student financial assistance are manifold. There is no simple solution, and a wide variety of approaches has emerged.
 - Dilemmas include elitism vs. low quality, broadening vs. expanding access, taxing universally for higher education vs. taxing graduates, and upfront vs. postgraduation charges.
 - The fairly rapid expansion and evolution of higher education has increased the need for funding. The politics of raising tuition fees can be intense, and many states face difficult choices.
 - Some participants argued for a postgraduation approach, which takes into account the employment outcomes of students. Others favoured using taxation to reduce or eliminate tuition fees.
 - Quality issues inevitably arise in discussions of higher education finance. Quality assurance systems in many states are nascent, though many have set targets and begun to focus on outcomes.
 - There is a growing need to for the reduction of non-financial barriers as a way of increasing access. Some states have pre-higher education outreach programs, for example. Low rates of return for some groups mean that more is needed to improve pathways to and perception of higher education.

24. Gwang-Jo Kim, Deputy Minister of Education and Human Resource Development, Korea, was the lead speaker for the second topic. Minister Bentley contributed to the discussion by pointing out that measuring quality assurance will be difficult if we do not define what high quality is. Recognizing that higher education has a social, cultural, and economic impact, how can higher education assist or increase the ability of our students (high quality skills), what skills set are we looking for in our students, what type of interactions between faculty and students is necessary, what are the completion and retention rates? Seeking OECD engagement in the collection and analyses of data would be helpful.
25. Gilles de Robien, Minister for Education, Higher Education and Research, France, led the discussion of the third topic, and the following conclusions were drawn:
 - Financing for higher education research needs to be strengthened.
 - Links between science and industry need to be strengthened.
 - People need to be given the tools and skills to adapt to change.
 - Policy should not ignore the social side of higher education research.
26. In addition to the consultations with BIAC and TUAC, the forum, and three plenary sessions, there was a dinner for ministers and head of delegation (hosted by Marietta Giannakou), as well as a working lunch (hosted by the new OECD Secretary General, Angel Gurría).
27. The head and deputy head of the Canadian delegation took advantage of the formal and informal sessions to meet with colleague ministers and senior officials from the participating OECD member and observer countries.
28. As the chair's summary of the meeting (reference paragraph 3 above) was not discussed, it is likely that some debate will follow in the Education Committee regarding items appearing in the summary that refer to possible future actions by OECD.
29. The Minister of Education for Turkey, Dr. Hüseyin Celik, invited ministers and heads of delegation to consider having the next ministerial meeting in Turkey.



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MEMBERS OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

Head of delegation

The Honourable Joan Burke

Chair of the Council of Ministers of
Education, Canada (CMEC)
& Minister of Education for Newfoundland
and Labrador,
Department of Education
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
A1B 4J6
Tel. : (709) 729-5040
Fax : (709) 729-0414
E-mail: joanburke@gov.nl.ca

Deputy Head of delegation

The Honourable Chris Bentley
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities,
Ontario
Queen's Park, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2
Tel: 416-326-1600
Fax: 416-326-1656
E-mail: Christopher.bentley@edu.gov.on.ca

Members of the delegation

M^{me} Jocelyne Bourgon
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
Permanent Delegation of Canada to the OECD
15bis, rue de Franqueville
75116 PARIS
Tel : (33) 1.44.43.20.21
Fax : (33) 1.44.43.20.99
E-mail:
jocelyne.bourgon@international.gc.ca

M^{me} Rachel Bard
Sous-ministre
Ministère de l'Éducation postsecondaire et
de la Formation, Nouveau-Brunswick
Complexe Chestnut
C.P. 6000
Fredericton, Nouveau-Brunswick E3B 5H1
Tel.: (506) 453-2343
Fax: (506) 453-3038
E-mail: Rachel.bard@gnb.ca

Mr. George Molloy
Director
International Programs
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
95 St. Clair West, Suite 1106
Toronto, Ontario M4V 1N6
Tel: (416) 962-8100, ext. 246
Fax: (416) 962-2800
E-mail: g.molloy@cmec.ca

Mr. Rob Esselment
Sr. Advisor to the Hon. C. Bentley
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Queen's Park, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2
Tel: 416.326.5748
Fax: 416.326.1656
Rob.Esselment@edu.gov.on.ca

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Ms. Jacquelyn Howard
Director of Communications
Ministry of Education for Newfoundland and
Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
St-John's, NL A1B 4J6
Tel : (709) 729-0048
Fax: 709-729-0414
E-mail: jacquelynhoward@gov.nl.ca

Mr. Neil Boucher
Director General
Learning Policy Directorate
Human Resources and Social Development
Canada
140 Promenade du Portage, 3rd floor
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9
Tel: (819) 953-8005
Fax: (819) 997-5433
E-mail: Neil.boucher@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Dr. Robert Sauder
Director - National Learning Systems
Learning Policy Directorate
Human Resources and Social Development
Canada
140 Promenade du Portage, 3rd floor
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9
Tel: (819) 953-2321
Fax: (819) 997-5433
E-mail: Robert.sauder@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Mme Sylvie Beauchamp
Conseillère cadre
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
du Québec
1035, rue De La Chevrotière
15e étage
Québec (Québec)
G1R 5A5
Tel: (418) 643-3810
Fax: (418) 646-1526
E-mail: sylvie.beauchamp@mels.gouv.qc.ca

Dr. Satya Brink
Director - Policy Research Group
Learning Policy Directorate
Human Resources and Social Development
Canada
140 Promenade du Portage, 3rd floor
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9
Tel: (819) 953-6622
Fax: (819) 997-5433
E-mail: Satya.brink@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

