



# Foreword

With the increasing importance of skills for economic and social prosperity, direct measures of human capital are necessary to understand how various skills develop over time, and how they contribute to social and economic growth. Thus, PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment) and PIAAC (the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), two of the most comprehensive OECD international assessments of skills, along with other national and regional assessments, are crucial for taking stock of a nation's human capital and for aligning policy goals to the needs of society. International comparisons provide a good indication of progress achieved and the challenges ahead.

While national and regional evidence continues to be important for management and accountability, it has become increasingly critical for countries to be able to benchmark their measures of human capital internationally for competitiveness and productivity. This evidence helps to identify strengths and weaknesses and to set standards and targets, so that policy makers can make strategic investments to match the pace of progress with that of the rest of the world. Furthermore, in an environment of fiscal restraint, it is more important than ever to ensure that investments in education and training are productive and efficient. Such investments will have greater success if decisions are based on evidence that identifies the policy-sensitive factors that promote skills development over the stages of a life. The demands on data and research to fill these needs are not likely to diminish in the future.

The focus of this report is on the development of reading proficiency during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood. The span of time between the ages of 15 and 24 is a critical period of development for young people. Once compulsory education is completed, individual decisions about post-secondary education, employment and other life choices have to be made, with major consequences for future learning and employment outcomes. A good foundation in reading proficiency facilitates success in specialised education during higher education or during job-related training. Since reading proficiency is not the goal of such specialised or professional learning, reading skills may begin to atrophy. So both learning gains and losses need to be considered as human capital is developed.

The cumulative model of reading development, which is widely used, assumes that once something has been learned it will be retained and applied throughout life. However, evidence now suggests that a more dynamic model of learning, which takes into account both gains and losses, more accurately reflects reality. To broaden knowledge about the acquisition of skills, factors that affect both gains and losses at each stage of life needs to be gathered from longitudinal data and analyses.

Moving forward, new and better measures of human capital will be needed to chart the role of skills in economic growth and social well-being at both the individual and national levels. Countries that have invested in PISA are exploring ways to improve the performance of their education systems to prepare their citizens for adult roles in society. Canada's investments in PISA, as well as in longitudinal data and reassessment of reading proficiency, provide insights into the importance of individual reading proficiency and later outcomes, such as educational attainment, further learning, employment and earnings. This report is thus a vital contribution to the understanding of learning gains between the ages of 15 and 24 and their impact on such outcomes, and provides a basis for evidence-based policy and strategic investments by the community of countries participating in PISA.

The report is the product of a collaborative effort between the countries participating in PISA, the experts and institutions working within the framework of the PISA Consortium, the OECD, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The production of the report was funded by a contribution from the government of Canada. The report was drafted by Fernando Cartwright, Darren King, Satya Brink, and Pablo Zoido. Tamara Knighton, from Statistics Canada, provided analytical support, while Patrick Bussi re and Tomasz Gluszynski provided guidance and input for the report from HRSDC and Pablo Zoido from the OECD Secretariat. Marilyn Achiron edited the report.

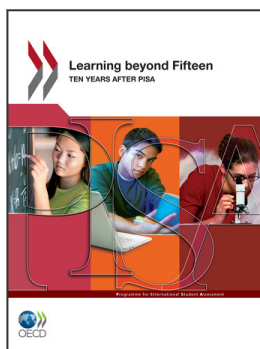


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**Lorna Bertrand**  
Chair of the PISA Governing Board

**Barbara Ischinger**  
Director for Education, OECD

**David McGovern**  
Senior Assistant Deputy Minister  
Strategic Policy and Research,  
Human Resources and  
Skills Development Canada



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