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Transitions Beyond Initial Education



The OECD has examined arrangements and policies surrounding the transitions beyond compulsory schooling. Extended education to at least completion of the upper secondary cycle is increasingly the norm right now across the OECD countries. Alongside shared patterns are marked differences on such matters as the relative proportions who engage in general or vocational study, as well as the possibilities to combine education with employment. Vocational education and training – which have tended to be neglected in countries compared with general school and university programmes, and which often do not well meet labour market needs – have been the focus for recent OECD review, with a new publication, Learning for Jobs. OECD policy orientations have stressed the need to improve the existence, diversity, relevance and transparency of different pathways, and the need to integrate them into a lifelong learning perspective, while protecting those left most vulnerable as others advance to further education and employment.



INTRODUCTION

OECD analyses have shed extensive light on the issues, arrangements and policies surrounding the transitions beyond compulsory schooling. Extended education with at least completion of the upper secondary cycle is increasingly the norm right across the OECD countries. Alongside shared patterns are marked differences on such matters as the relative proportions who engage in general or vocational study, as well as the possibilities to combine education with employment. OECD studies on guidance, information systems and qualifications have shown that there is much scope for improving transitions. Policy orientations have stressed the need to improve the existence, diversity, relevance and transparency of different pathways, while protecting those left most vulnerable as others advance to further education and employment.


Vocational education and training (VET) had not been studied by the OECD so extensively until recently and this has now been addressed with reviews of VET policies and of systemic innovation in the VET field. Work at the secondary level and apprenticeships, encapsulated in the new major report *Learning for Jobs*, will now be extended towards the role of post-secondary and tertiary vocational education in paving pathways to jobs. In the future, the OECD *Skills Strategy* will develop intelligence about national supply chains from the acquisition and development of skills, through their utilisation in labour markets and society more broadly, up to how they feed into better jobs, higher productivity, and ultimately better economic and social outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

Secondary education has become the dominant experience for 17-year-olds in OECD countries: At age 17, over 8 in 10 young people in OECD countries are in secondary education (83%). In some it is the quasi-totality of the age group at 90% or more (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Norway, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and the partner country Estonia). Seventeen-year-olds in education are only the minority in Mexico (49%) and Turkey (39%). Not all countries have figures for 17-year-olds already in post-secondary non-tertiary education, but among those that do, Austria stands out as having a sizeable minority of this teenage group (12%) transferred to such programmes. And in some countries, a small number have already launched on tertiary education even at this young age (the highest proportions being in Australia [5%], Canada [8%], Greece [9%], Ireland [5%], the Netherlands [6%], New Zealand [4%] and Turkey [6%], but with the partner country the Russian Federation well out ahead at 53%).


 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, 2010, Indicator C1

Very high proportions of young adults – recently in the education system – have now completed upper secondary education, though there are countries where these are still the minority: An average of 80% of 25-34 year-olds in OECD countries now complete at least the upper secondary stage of education (2008). This stands as high as 90% or more in Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Korea, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland, as well as in the partner country the Russian Federation. The main watershed of participation in formal education used to be marked by completion of lower secondary schooling but this is clearly now shifting upwards to the next level. This brings the “down-side” of the more acute relative disadvantage for the minority of young people who now leave without finishing upper secondary education. Still only half or fewer of young adults had reached this level of attainment in Mexico (40%), Portugal (47%) and Turkey (40%), and partner country Brazil (50%).

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, 2010, Indicator A1



Nearly three-quarters of 18-year-olds are still in education across OECD countries (73%), with already over a fifth in post-secondary education: In certain countries, the large majority of the age group continues in secondary education at 18 years of age: 80-90% in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Poland and Slovenia, and over 90% in Finland (93%) and Sweden (92%). In others, significant numbers have already embarked on tertiary programmes – a third or more of the age band in Belgium (36%), Canada (36%), Greece (46%), Ireland (34%), the United States (42%) and in partner country the Russian Federation (54%), rising to two-thirds in Korea (67%). Over one-in-five 18-year-olds in Austria (22%) and Ireland (23%) are in non-tertiary post-secondary programmes, compared with the OECD average of 3%.

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C1*

Completion of upper secondary education has become the norm over the past 20-30 years: While the completion of upper secondary education for younger adults stands at about 80% across OECD countries, it was only just over two-thirds for the older 45-54 year-olds in 2008 (68%) and lower still for the 55-64 year-olds at 58%. In certain countries, the increase in attainment between the younger and older adult cohorts separated by 30 years of age is dramatic: in Greece, it goes from 39% to 75%; in Ireland, from 45% to 85%; in Spain, from 29% to 65%. The growth is especially dramatic in Chile, rising from 39% for the older adult group to more than double at 85% for younger adults, and in Korea with 40% for the older adults to a universal 98%.

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator A1*


For young adults across OECD countries, very nearly 7 years can now be expected to be spent in education between the ages of 15 and 29: Synthesising current enrolment patterns for young people in their latter teens and twenties, not far off half (6.8 years) of the 15 years between mid-teenage years and the end of their twenties will now be spent in education. Eight years or more of this age span is spent in education in Denmark, Finland, Germany (men), Iceland, the Netherlands, Poland (women), Slovenia, Sweden (women) and the partner country Estonia (women). The “educational expectancy” of this transition age group tends to be longer among young women than young men though there are exceptions to this (Australia, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, Turkey). In Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the partner country Estonia, a young woman can expect on average to spend longer in education than a young man by close to a year or more.

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C3*

A relatively even balance between students enrolled in upper secondary general and vocational programmes across OECD countries as a whole hides very large differences across countries: Just over half of upper secondary level students (54.9%) are in “general” and the others are in pre-vocational and vocational tracks. Over 65% are in “general” tracks in Canada, Chile, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Portugal and the United Kingdom, and in the partner countries Brazil, Estonia and India. On the other hand, over 65% are in the vocational tracks in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic.

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C1*

In general, vocational education and training (VET) has been neglected: VET can play a central role in preparing young people for work, developing the skills of adults and responding to the labour-market needs of the economy. Despite this, VET has tended to be marginalised in policy discussions, often overshadowed by the increasing emphasis on general academic education and the role of schools in preparing students for university education. It is also often regarded as of low status by students and the general public. There are very limited data on VET available, especially data that can reliably be compared across countries.

 *Learning for Jobs, 2010, Summary and Policy Messages and Chapter 1*



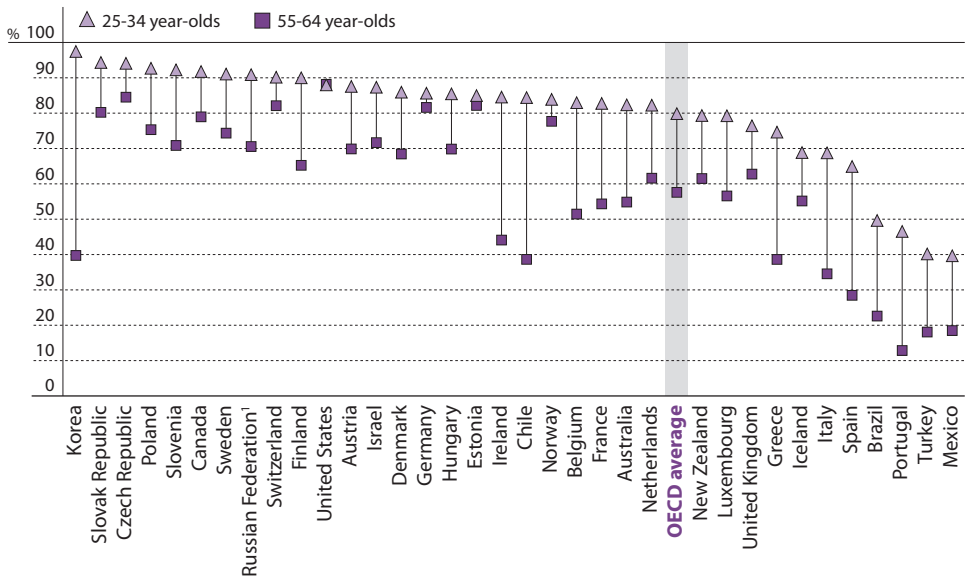
While strong vocational programmes increase competitiveness, many programmes fail to meet labour market needs: Many of the unskilled jobs which existed in OECD countries a generation ago are fast disappearing and OECD countries need to compete on the quality of goods and services they provide. This calls for a labour force well-equipped with middle-level trade, technical and professional skills usually delivered through vocational programmes alongside the high skills associated with university education. But VET systems face major challenges and vocational programmes for young people, often rooted in education institutions, tend to develop their own dynamic and can become too easily separated from the fast-changing world of modern economies.

Learning for Jobs, 2010, Summary and Policy Messages and Chapter 2

Figure 3.1.

Completion of upper secondary education is now the norm across OECD countries (2008)

Population that has attained at least upper secondary education, percentage, by age group



1. Year of reference 2002.

Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310092>

Certain countries do not mix education with employment together for young adults: How the average 6.8 of the 15 years between 15 and 29 years will be experienced – in particular whether it will include being in employment status while also in education – varies sharply from country to country. There are some where these years will be primarily devoted to education without mixing this with employment status. For instance, less than 12 months on average for men and women combined from age 15 to 29 are counted as being in both education and employment in the following countries: Belgium (0.6 in the total 6.9 years in education between these ages), Greece (0.4 in 6.6), Hungary (0.4 in 7.1), Italy (0.6 in 6.8), Japan (0.9 in 5.9 up to the age of 24 years), Luxembourg (0.4 in 7.8), Portugal (0.6 in 6.0), Spain (0.8 in 5.5) and Turkey (0.6 in 3.7).

Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C3



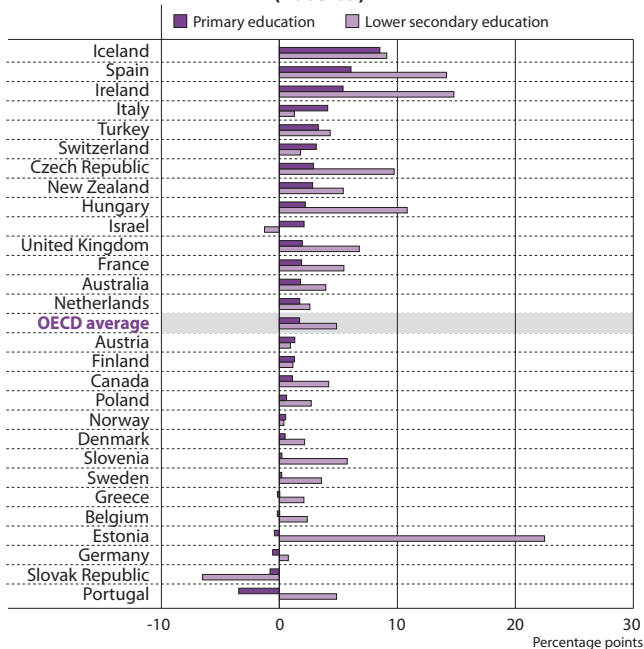
Box 3.1. Youth and economic crisis

The economic crisis has affected labour markets in a number of ways. Part-time work has increased, average actual hours worked by the full-time employed have decreased and the number of employees with temporary contracts has decreased in European countries. While the overall unemployment rate among the OECD countries increased by 2.0 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 (from 5.0% to 7.0%), the extent of the increase varies with age and level of education.

The youth population has been the most affected. The unemployment rate for 15-29 year-olds in OECD countries increased on average by 3.3 percentage points, from 10.2% to 13.5%. As a result of the economic crisis, the labour market is becoming more selective and the lack of relevant skills/experience brings a higher risk of unemployment for recent entrants. The extent of risk varies with the level of education.

Among OECD countries (excluding Chile, Japan, Korea, Mexico and the United States), the lowest increase in the unemployment rate between 2008 and 2009 has been among those with higher levels of education. It increased by 4.8 percentage points for those who did not complete upper secondary education, and by 1.7 percentage points for those who completed tertiary education. Workers with the lowest educational attainment are more likely to be in sectors such as construction or the automobile industry which have been severely affected by the crisis.

Change in unemployment rate for the 15-29 year-old population (2008-09)



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing; Hijman, R. (2009), "The Impact of the Crisis on Employment", *Statistics in Focus* 79/2009, Eurostat; and OECD (2010), *OECD Employment Outlook 2010*, OECD Publishing.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310453>



In other countries, being in “education” means being in employment as well for many young people:


There are other countries with a “mixed model” where an important part of the years in education are simultaneously in employment, including on work study programmes. In some countries indeed, more than half of this time in education will have the double status combining it with employment (Australia, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands and Switzerland).

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C3*


Across the OECD, 7.0% of 15-19 year-olds are not in education or employment, with more than double this level (14.7%) for 20-24 year-olds and significantly more in some countries: The countries where the shares of the teenage group out of education and not employed in 2008 reach double figures are Israel (22.2%), Spain (10.5%) and a high 32.6% in Turkey, with a relatively high level in partner country Brazil (13.8%). The numbers out of education and not employed among adults in their early twenties tend to be significantly higher: near or more than 20% of the 20-24 year-olds are in this situation in Italy (22.0%), Spain (19.4%), with very high levels in Israel (37.5%) and Turkey (44.6%), as well as in partner country Brazil (22.5%).

 *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators, 2010, Indicator C3*


In rapidly-changing economies, career guidance has become more critical but it suffers serious weaknesses in many OECD countries: Young people face a sequence of complex choices over a lifetime of learning and work; helping them to make these decisions is the task of career guidance. But in many countries, career guidance suffers from serious weaknesses. Too often those offering guidance are inadequately acquainted with labour market issues; guidance services can be fragmented, under-resourced and reactive, so that those who most need guidance risk failing to obtain it; many guidance personnel are based in education institutions and may give partial, pro-academic advice; relevant labour market information is too often not available or not readily comprehensible; and the evidence base on “what works” in career guidance is generally weak.

 *Learning for Jobs, 2010, Summary and Policy Messages and Chapter 3*

In most countries, there is a drop at upper secondary level in the students with special needs and receiving additional resources, compared with the primary and lower secondary levels: For students with disabilities, a median of 1.6% receive additional funding at this level as against 3.3% for lower secondary. (The only exception to the drop between levels among the countries with data is England.) Similarly, the proportion getting additional financial resources specifically for learning difficulties is lower at the upper than the lower secondary level, again with the exception of England. For those recognised as having disadvantages and being thereby entitled to additional resources, there is again a drop between the two levels in most countries, with only the Slovak Republic showing a marginal increase from lower to upper secondary.

 *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages: Policies, Statistics and Indicators – 2007 Edition, 2008, Chapter 4*

There is an important gap between the developed cognitive capacity in mid-teenagers (“high horsepower”) and their emotional maturity (“poor steering”): The insights provided by neuroscience on adolescence are especially important as this is the period when so much takes place in an individual's educational career. The secondary phase of education brings key decisions to be made with long-lasting consequences regarding personal, educational and career options. At this time, young people are already well-developed in terms of cognitive capacity (“high horsepower”) but they are immature (“poor steering”), not just because of inexperience, but because of under-developed neurological emotional development.


 *Understanding the Brain: The Birth of a Learning Science, 2007, Conclusions and Future Prospects*



POLICY DIRECTIONS

The lifelong learning approach entails a broad conception of foundation learning at the end of the secondary cycle: Most countries report reforms in this area that are aimed at raising the level of qualification of school-leavers and retaining more young people in upper secondary education. These include:

- **Increasing the relevance of initial education to work and the value of work-related qualifications in the job market:** This general aim to create a better match between the objectives of education systems and the needs of the firm can be done in various ways, including, for instance, the broadening and development of new frameworks for vocational education for young people in schools (as in Australia) or through reinforcing collaboration between the different partners (as in the reform of the dual system in the French Community of Belgium).
- **Broadening criteria for reforming school qualifications:** Looking beyond particular knowledge or competence sets, reforms include: the recognition of prior learning (e.g. Australia); the recognition of achievement across a whole programme rather than specific subject attainment (e.g. Ireland); and the development of a national certificate using “achievement standards” developed for the school curriculum and unit standards from the national qualifications framework (e.g. New Zealand).
- **Developing better progression routes for young people within and between qualifications:** Examples include enabling the easier vertical and horizontal transfer from one educational level to another (Slovenia), and flexible dual trajectories combining learning and work (the Netherlands).


 *Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning*, 2007, Chapter 2

The recent VET study has synthesised wide-ranging analysis and review into five key recommendations. These include:


- **Provide the right mix of skills for the labour market:** Provide a mix of VET training places that reflect both student preferences and employer needs, and share the costs of doing so between government, employers and individuals according to who will benefit. Engage employers and unions in curriculum development to ensure that the skills taught correspond to those needed in the modern workplace while also ensuring that the VET fosters generic, transferable skills and that students in vocational programmes have adequate numeracy and literacy skills.
- **Reform career guidance to deliver well-informed career advice for all:** Develop a coherent career guidance profession, independent from psychological counselling and well-informed by labour market information. Recognise the importance of guidance by resourcing and evaluating it adequately, and ensure objective and abundant information about careers and courses, including through partnerships with employers.
- **Recruit sufficient numbers of teachers and trainers, and ensure they are well-acquainted with modern employment needs and are pedagogically prepared:** Promote flexible pathways of recruitment and facilitate the entry of those with industry skills into the VET teacher workforce. Provide appropriate pedagogical preparation for trainers, adapted to the learning being provided. Encourage part-time working and interchange between VET institutions and industry, so that vocational teachers can update their knowledge, and trainers in firms spend time in VET institutions to enhance their pedagogical skills.
- **Make full use of workplace learning:** Make substantial use of workplace training in initial VET, ensuring that the system encourages participation by both employers and students, and that the training is of good quality, (with effective quality assurance and a clear contractual framework for apprenticeships). Sustain workplace training and respond to increased demand for full-time VET during the difficult economic climate.



- **Support the VET system by engaging stakeholders and promoting transparency:** Systematically engage with employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders in VET policy and provision and qualification frameworks, strengthening quality assurance and adopting national assessment frameworks to underpin consistent quality. Strengthen data on the labour market outcomes of VET, and the institutional capacity to use that data.

 *Learning for Jobs*, 2010, Chapters 2-6 and Executive Summary

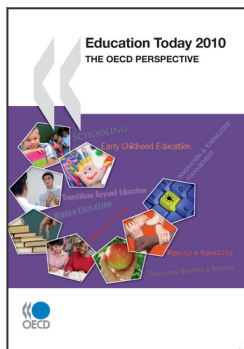
Recognise the gap between the cognitive capacity and emotional maturity in teenagers to avoid definitive choices: The gap between intellectual and emotional capacity cannot imply that important choices should simply be delayed until adulthood when the gap closes. It does suggest, with the additional powerful weight of neurological evidence, that the options taken should not take the form of definitively closing doors.

 *Understanding the Brain: The Birth of a Learning Science*, 2007, Chapter 2



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