

Executive summary

Education can boost the overall quality of life of each individual, as well as help economies to be stronger, fairer and more resilient. Today, globalisation brings new opportunities and challenges in education, as countries must equip students with the necessary skills to live and work in a more interconnected world. Understanding this, OECD education systems strive to implement education policies that can help people in countries around the world to access better life chances.

Taking the students' perspective, *Education Policy Outlook 2018: Putting Student Learning at the Centre* analyses the evolution of key education priorities and key education policies in 43 education systems. It compares more recent developments in education policy ecosystems (mainly between 2015 and 2017) with various education policies adopted between 2008 and 2014, many of which were included in *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*.

Evolution of key education priorities and policies across participating education systems (2008-17)

This report identifies some common areas of education policy priorities and policy actions to foster equity and quality and prepare students for the future, based on reports from education systems and previous OECD work.

Bridging gaps from early on to increase equity and quality

Education policy priorities

The OECD and several education systems have identified bridging different types of performance gaps as policy priorities. A first group of gaps relates to students' socio-economic, immigrant, minority, special education needs (SEN) and gender-specific background, as well as performance differences among students across regions. The report also identifies education systems' interest in tackling student success through better access to and quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The OECD and some OECD education systems have also commented on the need to reduce grade repetition and delay tracking.

Types of education policy measures

Policies to support education success for all are the largest group of policies reported by participating OECD education systems, including Australia, Chile, New Zealand and Slovenia. Education systems reported at least 25 policies still in place (2008-14) aiming, for example, to support students from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds and population sub-groups, students with SEN or those living in different regions within a country. Recent policies (2015-17) are fewer in number but highlight similar objectives.

OECD education systems have also worked to increase access to ECEC and to improve both the quality of ECEC and the transition to primary education. While policies reported from 2008 to 2014 tend to be broader in scope, more recent policies collected (2015-17) tend to target children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Compared to other policy areas, participating education systems reported fewer policies specifically targeting system-level practices. Some have taken measures to reduce grade repetition and the stratification of early tracking, as in Austria or Belgium (French Community). In the case of tracking, the low number of policies reported may be because implementing this type of policy can require broader structural changes, more consequent use of additional resources or deeper changes in social conceptions.

Equipping students with essential skills for today and the future

Education policy priorities

Connecting population groups outside of the education system to the labour market appears to remain a policy priority in participating education systems. Policy priorities identified include: 1) reducing high levels of skills mismatch, as well as early school leaving rates; 2) facilitating the school-to-work transition for students; and 3) decreasing levels of youth unemployment and the number of young people neither employed nor in education or training (NEET).

Another focus of policy priorities identified is on improving students' learning opportunities and keeping them longer in the education system. Specifically, policy priorities identified relate to: 1) raising the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET); 2) creating or strengthening apprenticeship programmes; 3) increasing equal access to and quality of tertiary education; and 4) enhancing the internationalisation of higher education.

Types of education policy measures

Participating education systems have implemented policies to keep students in the system, while improving their learning opportunities, as in Canada (Quebec), France, Italy and Mexico. Advancing student orientation, revising qualifications or updating course curricula are some of the policy options followed by education systems. Recently implemented policies (2015-17) concentrate on similar areas, but also on technology education and support for migrants and refugees.

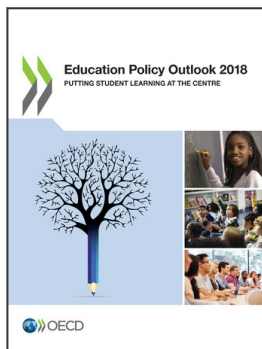
Regarding VET, reported policies focus on putting in place strategies and tools to improve the quality of VET, support students during their transition into post-secondary education or the labour market, and improve access to and attractiveness of VET. More recent policies (2015-17) have set targets in the same areas, as in Finland and Hungary.

Reported policies targeting tertiary education continue to focus on enhancing access and quality by supporting students from specific population groups, as well as increasing internationalisation in national education systems, as in Australia, Finland and Japan. Education systems have modified higher education frameworks to improve quality, access and relevance of education for more students and to meet the needs of the labour market. More recent policies (2015-17) address similar objectives, as well as quality assurance methods in higher education.

According to information provided by education systems, there has been stability between the policies still in place (2008-14) and those more recently implemented (2015-17) on topics related to enhancing students' transitions across education pathways and the labour market. Policies to improve transitions continue to aim to: 1) strengthen the links between education qualifications and the labour market; 2) foster the connection of employers with job seekers; 3) implement funding techniques to help individuals gain better access to training; 4) reintegrate NEETs into the labour market; and 5) increase general co-operation and co-ordination between tertiary education and stakeholders. More recent policies (2015-17) focus on similar policy areas.

Education policy success through increased knowledge and capacity in the system

Policy success depends on the design and specific features of the policies themselves, but also on the overall complexity of the policy ecosystem at the stage when implementation strategies are being developed. Here, it is important to engage actors, including students, based on a shared understanding and supported by stronger capacities and resources. In the same way, better policy evaluation and contextual understanding should permeate the system. Evaluations can offer both summative and formative perspectives of specific reform implementation and can help identify factors that can promote success in policy implementation. Evidence shows that OECD countries take several measures to improve reform success: enhancing the inclusion of stakeholders, elevating the role of evidence in the reform process, and developing a clear strategic vision for education systems and associated policies.



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