

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: THE FOCUS ON TEACHERS

Summary

The OECD has made a major international study of policies for attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers in schools. Drawing on the experiences of 25 countries around the world, and extensive data and research, the OECD project has analysed the key developments affecting teachers and their work, and developed policy options for countries to consider.

Significant long-term questions are being raised about the need for school systems to become much more competitive in recruiting skilled and motivated people as teachers, and how to improve the effectiveness of teachers' work. This chapter discusses why teacher policy is high on national agendas, describes the methodology used in the project, and highlights the main policy challenges that countries now face.

The project focuses on teacher policy issues in 25 countries: Australia; Austria; Belgium (Flemish Community); Belgium (French Community); Canada (Quebec); Chile; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; Korea; Mexico; the Netherlands; Norway; the Slovak Republic; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; the United Kingdom and the United States.

There are some striking differences among countries in their approaches to teacher recruitment, teacher education, teacher pay and working conditions, teacher employment, evaluation and career structures. International analysis provides countries with an opportunity to learn more about themselves by examining their experiences against those of other countries, as well as building up evidence on the impact of different approaches to teacher policy. The report provides many examples of innovative and promising teacher policy developments from around the world.

A much larger number of new teachers will enter the profession in the next 5-10 years than in the past 20 years. The entry of substantial numbers of new teachers with up-to-date skills and fresh ideas has the potential to substantially renew the schools. However, if teaching is not perceived as an attractive profession, and teaching does not change in fundamental ways, there is a risk that the quality of schools will decline. There are high stakes in teacher policy.

1.1. The Growing Focus on Teacher Issues

Teacher policy is high on national agendas. The far-reaching economic and social changes underway have made high-quality schooling more important than ever before. The demands on schools and teachers are becoming more complex. OECD Education Ministers have committed their countries to the goal of raising the quality of learning for all. This ambitious goal will not be achieved unless all students receive high-quality teaching.

All countries are seeking to improve their schools, and to respond better to higher social and economic expectations. Schooling provides the foundations for learning throughout life, and for individual and national development. As the most significant resource in schools, teachers are central to school improvement efforts. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students have access to high-quality teaching. Meetings of OECD Education Ministers have underlined the critical importance of teachers and their work for the quality of schooling.

However, many countries have an ageing teaching force, and are finding it difficult to attract well-qualified new entrants into teaching, or to retain them for long once they start. Some other countries still benefit from a plentiful supply of people wishing to become a teacher, and have relatively low rates of teacher turnover. Nevertheless, there can be quality concerns when teacher shortages are not readily apparent. All the participating countries report concerns in ensuring that teachers are well prepared for the demands of more diverse student populations, higher social expectations of schools, expanding fields of knowledge, and new types of responsibilities. Teacher policy needs therefore to address both quantity and quality issues, not least because in many respects they are closely intertwined.

Teacher issues are also currently high on policy agendas because of concerns expressed by teachers themselves about the future of their profession – whether it is sufficiently attractive to talented new entrants, and whether teachers are sufficiently rewarded and supported in their work. As teachers are in daily contact with the students who potentially form the next generation of teachers, the enthusiasm and morale of the current teacher workforce are important influences on future teacher supply.

The current timing of the upsurge of interest in teacher policy issues is particularly important. The fact that the large numbers of teachers who were recruited during the great expansion period of the 1960s and 1970s are now close to retirement is both a major challenge and an unprecedented opportunity in most countries. Although large amounts of experience and skills need to be replaced as teachers retire, a number of countries now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape and benefit from substantial changes in the teacher workforce. A much larger number of new teachers will enter the profession in the next 5-10 years than in the past 20 years. The entry of substantial numbers of new teachers with up-to-date skills and fresh ideas has the potential to substantially renew the schools. As well, there is scope to free up resources for development as a younger teacher workforce implies fewer budgetary pressures. Such changes would contribute to the realisation of the “re-schooling” scenario whereby schools make a vital contribution to community development and enjoy high levels of public trust (OECD, 2001). On the other hand, if teaching is not perceived as an attractive profession, and teaching does not change in fundamental ways, there is a risk that the quality of schools will decline and a downward spiral will be difficult to reverse. This unwelcome prospect has been termed

the “meltdown scenario” under which teacher shortages turn into a real staffing crisis (OECD, 2001). There are high stakes in teacher policy.

1.2. Overview of the Broad Policy Directions

This report is concerned with policies that contribute to attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers in schools. The report draws on a major OECD study of teacher policy conducted in collaboration with 25 countries around the world (see Appendix 1). The fact that so many countries took part indicates that teacher issues are a priority for public policy, and likely to become even more so in future years.

The report aims to provide a comprehensive international analysis of:

- Trends and developments in the teacher workforce.
- Evidence on the key factors in attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers.
- Innovative and successful teacher policies and practices.
- Teacher policy options for countries to consider.
- Priorities for future work at national and international levels.

The report identifies policy initiatives being undertaken at two levels. The first concerns the teaching profession as a whole and includes measures to ensure that society values teachers’ work, that teaching is seen as exciting and worthwhile, and that teachers’ training and work environments are improved. The second is more targeted, and recognises that there is not a single, uniform labour market for teachers. Rather, there is a set of different labour markets distinguished by type of school (primary, secondary, vocational and so on) and individual characteristics (such as gender, age, previous work experience, academic ability and subject specialisation). Such initiatives are focusing on the factors that attract and retain particular types of people into teaching, and teachers to work in particular schools.

The quality of teaching is determined not just by the “quality” of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also by the environment in which they work. Able teachers are not necessarily going to reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge and reward. Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need both to recruit competent people into the profession, and also to provide support and incentives for professional development and ongoing performance at high levels.

Not all of the findings and policy implications apply equally to each country. Countries have different social, economic and educational structures and traditions, and are at different stages of policy development. To reflect this, the report attempts to identify the key priorities for countries facing different circumstances. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of country situations, some broad common directions can be identified, and these are elaborated in the chapters that follow. In part these policy initiatives have been compelled by the need for school systems to become much more competitive in recruiting skilled and motivated people as teachers, but they also reflect judgements that the quality of teaching and learning will improve as a result. Significant

long-term questions are being raised about how to make teaching more enjoyable and interesting, and how to improve the effectiveness of teachers' work.

1.3. Methodology and Country Participation

The project was based on volunteer countries working collaboratively with each other and with the OECD Secretariat. It involved examining country-specific issues and policy responses in attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers, and placing these experiences within a broader, international framework to generate insights and findings relevant to countries as a whole. Appendix 1 details the processes involved, the country reports and other documents that have been produced and the large number of organisations and people who contributed to the project and to the preparation of this report.

The project involved two complementary approaches: an *Analytical Review strand*; and a *Country Review strand*. The Analytical Review strand used several means – Country Background Reports, literature reviews, data analyses and commissioned papers – to analyse the factors that shape attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers, and possible policy responses. All 25 participating countries were involved in this strand. In addition, nine countries also chose to host a Country Review, which involved external review teams undertaking an intensive case study visit whose conclusions were then reflected in a Country Note.

The countries taking part in the project were:¹

- *Analytical Review strand* (25 countries, involving 26 background reports): Australia; Austria; Belgium (Flemish Community); Belgium (French Community); Canada (Quebec); Chile; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Japan; Korea; Mexico; the Netherlands; Norway; the Slovak Republic; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; the United Kingdom and the United States.
- *Country Review strand* (9 countries involving 10 review visits): Austria; Belgium (Flemish Community); Belgium (French Community); Germany; Hungary; Italy; Korea; Spain; Sweden and Switzerland.

The collaborative approach provided countries with an opportunity to learn more about themselves by examining their experiences against those of other countries. There are some striking differences among countries in regard to their teacher workforces, as illustrated by several indicators from OECD (2004):

Age: in Germany and Italy more than 50% of lower secondary teachers are aged 50 years or older, whereas less than 10% of Korean teachers are in this age group.

Gender: in the Czech Republic and Hungary females comprise more than 80% of lower secondary teachers, while only 40% of Japanese lower secondary teachers are female.

¹ However, to the extent they are covered by the OECD Education Database, OECD countries which did not take part in the project are still considered in the analysis and feature in the report's figures and tables.

Teacher education: in Italy it takes an average of 8 years of tertiary education to train as an upper secondary teacher compared to 4 years in Australia and England.

Salaries: in Korea a primary teacher with 15 years experience earns around 2.7 times GDP per capita (a broad measure of average income), while in the Slovak Republic an equivalent teacher earns only around 0.55 times GDP per capita.

By documenting such differences among countries, and trying to understand their causes and consequences, comparative analysis can help to raise questions about long-established practices, as well as help accumulate evidence on the impact of different policy approaches.

1.4. Organisation of the Report

The report has six further chapters. Chapter 2 provides the rationale for the study, and outlines the framework that was used, including the ways in which the key areas of teacher policy are interconnected. Chapters 3 to 6 are concerned with the main issues driving the project: attracting competent people into the teaching profession (Chapter 3); developing teachers' skills and knowledge (Chapter 4); recruiting, selecting and employing teachers (Chapter 5); and retaining effective teachers in schools (Chapter 6). Each of these chapters discusses the trends and developments that are giving rise to policy concerns, the main factors involved, examples of innovative policy responses, evidence on policy impact, and options for countries to consider. Chapter 7 discusses ways to build teacher, education union and other stakeholder involvement in policy development and implementation, the major gaps in the research and information base, and priorities for future work. Appendix 1 details the process by which the project was conducted, and the range of outputs in addition to this report. Appendix 2 provides an indicators framework for informing teacher policy and assesses the current availability of data at both national and international levels.

The following chapters provide many examples of country initiatives in teacher policies and programmes. A number of particularly innovative and promising initiatives are highlighted in self-contained boxes that provide more detail on the reforms. Nevertheless, due to space constraints, it has not been possible to provide all of the necessary detail, and readers are encouraged to consult the relevant Country Background Reports, Country Review reports, and research studies. All the documents produced through the project are listed in Appendix 1 and available from www.oecd.org/edu/teacherpolicy.

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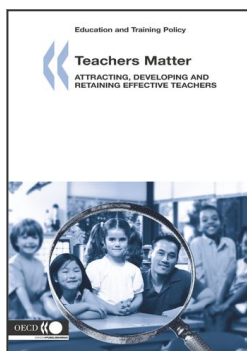
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Table of contents

Foreword.....	3
Executive Summary.....	7
Chapter 1 Introduction: the Focus on Teachers.....	17
1.1. The Growing Focus on Teacher Issues.....	18
1.2. Overview of the Broad Policy Directions.....	19
1.3. Methodology and Country Participation.....	20
1.4. Organisation of the Report.....	21
Chapter 2 Why is Teacher Policy Important?.....	23
2.1. Quality Teaching is Vital for Improving Student Learning.....	24
2.2. Teachers are Significant in the Labour Force and in School Budgets.....	27
2.3. Teacher Policy Concerns are Intensifying.....	27
2.4. Analysing Teacher Policy.....	30
2.5. Analysing the Teacher Labour Market.....	33
Chapter 3 Making Teaching an Attractive Career Choice.....	39
3.1. Concerns about Teaching’s Attractiveness.....	40
3.2. Estimating the Future Demand for Teachers.....	60
3.3. Factors in the Attractiveness of Teaching as a Career.....	67
3.4. Priorities for Future Policy Development.....	86
Chapter 4 Developing Teachers’ Knowledge and Skills.....	95
4.1. Teachers’ Roles are Changing.....	97
4.2. Implications of Research on Effective Teachers.....	99
4.3. Initial Teacher Education.....	102
4.4. Certification of New Teachers.....	114
4.5. Induction Programmes for New Teachers.....	117
4.6. Professional Development.....	121
4.7. Priorities for Future Policy Development.....	131
Chapter 5 Recruiting, Selecting and Employing Teachers.....	141
5.1. Teaching and Public Service Employment.....	142
5.2. Features of Teachers’ Employment Conditions.....	144
5.3. Teacher Recruitment and Selection.....	150
5.4. Probationary Periods for Beginning Teachers.....	155
5.5. Responses to Short-term Staffing Needs.....	157
5.6. Teacher Mobility.....	159
5.7. Priorities for Future Policy Development.....	161
Chapter 6 Retaining Effective Teachers in Schools.....	169
6.1. Concerns about Retaining Effective Teachers in Schools.....	170
6.2. Factors in Retaining Effective Teachers in Schools.....	177
6.3. Priorities for Future Policy Development.....	204

Chapter 7	Developing and Implementing Teacher Policy	213
7.1.	Engaging Teachers in Policy Development and Implementation	214
7.2.	Improving the Knowledge Base to Support Teacher Policy	218
Appendix 1	How the Activity was Conducted	223
	Background to the OECD Activity	223
	Purposes of the OECD Activity	223
	Methodology and Country Participation	224
Appendix 2	A Framework for Informing Teacher Policy	233



From:
Teachers Matter
Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264018044-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2005), "Introduction: The Focus on Teachers", in *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264018044-2-en>

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