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## INTRODUCTION

In 2001 OECD Education Ministers endorsed the theme of *investing in competencies for all* to guide the education work of the Organisation over the next five years. This theme reflects the goal of ensuring that all citizens have the basic competencies on which other learning depends, and the high-level intellectual and social competencies necessary for full engagement in the knowledge society. It builds on the commitments Ministers made to *lifelong learning for all* in 1996.

Education policy increasingly embraces the entire spectrum of learning: from the pre-school years, through primary and secondary schooling and tertiary education to adult learning. Education must build strong foundations for learning; and also enable people to continue building by developing the motivation and competence to manage their own learning. The education policy agenda is both long-term and multi-faceted. Its very breadth can raise concerns about where priorities should be placed, and how effective new strategies can be introduced. The analyses reported annually in *Education Policy Analysis* are intended to assist in these deliberations.

It is increasingly recognised that high-quality programmes are needed to give all young children a strong start in lifelong learning. An unequal start in learning will become increasingly costly to remedy later on, as well as individually damaging and socially divisive. And yet, in a number of countries policy making and programme coverage in the early childhood area remains fragmented and piecemeal. Chapter 1 draws on country experience and recent research to provide a better understanding of how the pieces can be put together more coherently.

The OECD is also improving the evidence base on school-level policies that provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning. For example, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicated that there is substantial variation among countries, and within some countries, in 15 year-olds' achievement in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. However, the further analyses of PISA reported in Chapter 2 show that it is possible to combine high performance standards with an equitable distribution of learning outcomes. Quality and equity need not be seen as competing policy objectives.

In identifying the need for schools to adapt to changing social circumstances, and to successfully meet the learning requirements of all young people, OECD Education Ministers have placed a strong emphasis on the capacity of the teaching workforce. However, there are serious difficulties in many countries in maintaining an adequate supply of good quality teachers, and further developing the skills of those already in the profession. Chapter 3 argues that teacher shortages raise concerns about quality as well as quantity. It reviews the international data on measures of shortfalls in teacher supply, identifies the policy challenges that shortages give rise to, and outlines policy tools that need to be considered.

One interesting means by which increasing numbers of students manage their own learning is by travelling to another country to study, or by accessing overseas education services while living at home. Rapid developments in e-learning, and competition from a wide range of education and training providers, are accelerating these trends. While data on such developments remain uneven, Chapter 4 provides a major new profile of cross-border education activity. The increased connectivity among national education systems means that difficult policy questions about student access, institutional funding and regulation, and quality assurance, now need to be confronted in an international context.

People's motivation to learn and competence to manage their learning is fundamental to promoting lifelong learning. The importance of strengthening these aspects is brought out in Chapter 5. It draws on recent empirical work to argue that the concept of "human capital" needs to be broadened beyond directly productive capacities to encompass the characteristics that allow a person to build, manage and

deploy his/her skills. These include the ability and motivation to learn, effective job search skills, and personal characteristics that help one work well, as well as the capacity to blend a successful life with a good career. Such competencies, which are critical for economic success as well as social and personal development, need to be more explicitly built into educational policies and programmes.

To assist Member countries in such important tasks, the OECD is giving education a higher profile in its work. On 1 September 2002 a new Directorate for Education was created. As the OECD Secretary-General said, “our work on education will retain important connections with our work in other areas such as employment, social issues, science and technology, governance, and macro-economics but its independent status makes clear the importance we attach to it”. This higher profile reflects the greater emphasis that Member countries are placing on education, and developing people’s competencies more generally. A well-educated population that is engaged in on-going learning is fundamental to social and economic development, as well as an important goal in its own right.

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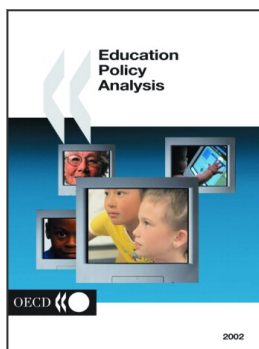
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