

Conference for the dissemination of results from the OECD Thematic
Review on Tertiary Education
“Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society”
Lisbon, 3-4 April 2008

Closing remarks by Barbara Ischinger, OECD Director for Education

State Secretary Heitor, Professor Sentieiro, Ms Chairman, Honoured guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to express the OECD’s gratitude to all of you for making this Conference an extremely enriching and enlightening event.

My thanks extend, of course, to our Portuguese hosts – at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation and at the Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Impresa (ISCTE) – for their generosity and excellent organisation. I am sure that all participants would agree that we have not only enjoyed intellectually-fulfilling discussions. We have also greatly appreciated Portuguese hospitality. We thank you for that.

Tertiary education has to adapt if it is to meet the challenges of the Knowledge society. Status quo is NOT an option. So what are the main messages that have emerged from this conference?

Let me point to three conclusions that particularly struck me:

First, countries need to ensure the outward focus of institutions, with greater autonomy and diversity so that they can be more responsive to new demands.

Second, countries need to adequately fund tertiary education with a mix of public funding and appropriate cost-sharing. But cost-sharing also needs a solid support system. This could be based on a universal loan system with income-contingent repayments as well as means-tested grant schemes. My thanks to Nick Barr for providing us with such a clear presentation on such a controversial issue.

And *third*, countries need to develop an internationalisation strategy to address the many changes in this area.

I am particularly struck by the breadth of issues to consider and the number of tradeoffs facing policy makers and institutional leaders. One clear lesson from the conference here is that there is no “one-size fits all” approach here. Countries need to devise their own approach, in light of their own goals and with due consideration for their circumstances. Basically the message is to build upon natural advantages and to acknowledge constraints.

This review of tertiary education has given you a comprehensive report to take back home. Already people have told us that it will stand as the reference for years to come. The next steps in following through on the policy analysis and conclusions are up to you in each of your countries.

At the international level, we have found that there is still more to be done at the OECD. We have other work going on dealing with other aspects of tertiary education. Within the Directorate of Education we have a study on quality teaching at institutional level and we are about to launch a feasibility study on assessing learning outcomes in higher education. And we are contributing to wider OECD work with the contribution of tertiary student mobility to high-skill migration, and, of course, the OECD's Innovation Strategy.

On that note, my colleagues and I thank you all once again for your input into making this conference and the whole tertiary review a great success. I am confident that we are well on the way towards tertiary education for the knowledge society.