



Definition and Selection of Key Competencies

DeSeCo Symposium

Geneva, February 11-13, 2002

International Conference Center
15, rue de Varembé
CH-1211 Geneva 20

Program

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The Swiss Federal Statistical Office, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the National Center for Education Statistics, United States Department of Education, and Statistics Canada are jointly convening an international symposium on the definition and selection of key competencies.

The symposium is an activity of the program *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (DeSeCo), which has been in progress since the end of 1997 under the auspices of the OECD and is led by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office with support from the United States and Canada. It was launched to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual foundations for building a consensus about a set of key competencies and for discussing which competencies might be appropriate for inclusion in the assessment of learning outcomes at the international level.

The Educational Research Unit (SRED) of the Department of Public Instruction (DIP) in Geneva will host the symposium and organize the local arrangements.

Background

Far-reaching changes in economic, social, and political life, as well as technological development, pose major challenges in all societies. To meet the demands of an increasingly interdependent and complex world, in which different aspirations and values may be in conflict, education is seen as a crucial investment and an important asset for both individuals and societies. Sustainable economic development, social welfare, cohesion, and justice as well as personal well-being are closely bound up with the knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals and groups.

In line with a growing concern expressed by governments and the general public about the adequacy and quality of education and training, several empirical studies have been launched over the past decade to examine learning outcomes, some under the auspices of or in collaboration with the OECD. Recognizing that curriculum-based and subject-related basic competencies do not capture the full range of relevant outcomes, the OECD is interested in broadening the assessment of young people and adults to include a wider range of competencies. Beyond skills such as reading, writing, and calculating, what competencies are needed for the individual to lead a successful and responsible life and for contemporary societies to cope with present and future challenges? This was the starting point for an international and interdisciplinary endeavor conducted under the auspices of the OECD and led by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO). The program *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations* (DeSeCo) seeks to:

- advance the conceptual foundations for defining and selecting relevant human competencies
- develop a conceptual basis that is both rooted in theory and interpretable in policy terms for the continued development of international assessment programs of key competencies
- suggest reference points for the interpretation of empirical results about the outcomes of education.

Objectives of the symposium

Through an interdisciplinary approach and by stimulating discussion among key players experienced in policy and practice DeSeCo seeks to contribute to the international debate on the topic of competencies, and, in particular, key competencies.

The three main objectives of the 2nd International DeSeCo Symposium are to:

- highlight issues related to the conceptualization and construction of a set of relevant (key) competencies that spans all spheres of life and different social contexts. Competencies should be linked to important societal demands, policy issues, and social practices (such as socio-economic context or the political, institutional, and cultural characteristics of a particular region)
- create a dialogue among the research community, policy analysts and policy-makers at the national level, leaders in social arenas, and representatives of international organizations. The symposium will provide a forum for debate, exploration and reflection, with the purpose of working towards a common understanding and consolidating an overarching frame of reference for defining, selecting, and eventually assessing key competencies relevant for OECD member countries and possibly beyond
- outline options and strategies that contribute to the eventual development of assessments for key competencies in an international context. DeSeCo aims to contribute to broadening the range of competencies covered in assessment programs in order to respond to the needs of policymakers and practitioners for new information about competencies of young people and adults.

Main discussion topics

Defining and selecting key competencies is a complex process that can be addressed from a multitude of disciplinary, theoretical, and cultural perspectives. Topics which will be addressed include competencies in and across important social fields, similarities and differences among nations and cultures, lifelong learning and the development of key competencies, and assessment strategies.

Schedule Overview

Monday, February 11, 2002

12.30 - 13.45	Registration and light refreshments
14.00 - 15.45	Session 1: <i>Opening and Introduction</i> Welcome addresses Keynote address
15.45 - 16.15	Break
16.15 - 17.00	Session 2: <i>Key Competencies in OECD countries – similarities and differences</i> Presentation Questions from the floor
17.00 - 18.15	Session 3: <i>Key competencies and their relevance for human, social, and economic development beyond OECD</i> Panel discussion
18.15 - 19.15	Reception hosted by the Canton of Geneva

Tuesday, February 12, 2002

9.00 - 10.15	Session 4: <i>Critical competencies in relevant social fields</i> Presentations from different perspectives Questions from the floor
10.15 - 10.45	Break
10.45 - 12.45	Session 5: <i>Towards a framework for defining and selecting key competencies</i> Presentation Parallel workshops
12.45 - 14.30	Lunch

14.30 - 15.15	Session 5 (continued): Parallel workshops
15.15 - 16.15	Reports to the plenary
16.15 - 16.45	Break
16.45 - 18.00	Session 6: <i>Lifelong Learning – development of key competencies</i> Presentations Questions from the floor
19.30	Reception and Group Dinner (Restaurant <i>Aux Halles de l'Île</i>)

Wednesday, February 13, 2002

9.00 - 11.00	Session 7: <i>Key competencies – moving towards indicators and assessments</i> Presentation Panel discussion
11.00 - 11.30	Break
11.30 – 12.00	Session 8: <i>Conclusions, next steps and adjournment</i> Concluding remarks Closing

Agenda

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2002 (14.00 - 18.15)

Chairperson:

Carlo Malaguerra, former Director General, Swiss Federal Statistical Office

SESSION ONE

Opening and Introduction

14.00 – 15.00

Welcome addresses

Ruth Dreifuss, Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, Switzerland

Martine Brunschwig Graf, President, Geneva State Council

Barry McGaw, Deputy Director for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD

Valena White Plisko, Associate Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education

Satya Brink, Director, Human Resources Development, Canada

15.00 – 15.45

Keynote address

Mental demands of modern life: Implications for defining competencies

Robert Kegan, Harvard University Graduate School of Education

15.45 – 16.15 Break

SESSION TWO

Key competencies in OECD countries – similarities and differences

16.15 – 17.00

What is the relevance of key competencies in OECD countries? Which competencies (or sets of competencies) have been identified as necessary for individuals to cope with important demands and challenges? To what extent are key competencies generally similar from country to country, region to region?

What are the political, social, and economic factors that influence the definition and selection processes of key competencies in different socioeconomic and cultural environments, and how is this influence exercised?

Presentation

Countries' views on key competencies - some results and comments

Uri Peter Trier, University of Neuchâtel

Questions from the floor

SESSION THREE

Key competencies and their relevance for human, social and economic development beyond OECD

17.00 – 18.15

Prioritizing a limited number of competencies raises questions such as what for, in support of which interests and objectives, according to which criteria? What is the relevance of key competencies for the work of international organizations other than the OECD? What is seen as the contribution of key competencies to human, social, and economic development?

Panel discussion

Moderation:

Albert Tuijnman, Stockholm University

Panelists:

Marit Granheim, World Bank

Tom Griffin, United Nations Development Programme

Denise Lievesley, UNESCO

John Morley, European Commission, CEC

18.15 – 19.15 at the Main Hall (International Conference Center Varembe)

Reception hosted by the Government of the Canton of Geneva

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2002 (9.00 - 18.00)

Chairperson:

Barry McGaw, Deputy Director for Education, OECD

SESSION FOUR

Critical competencies in relevant social fields

9.00 – 10.15

What are the important demands that individuals face in modern, democratic societies? Which competencies are necessary for participation in different spheres of life, such as the economic sector, political life, family life? Is it possible to identify a finite set of competencies necessary for individuals to lead successful lives and for societies to face the challenges of the present and future?

Presentations from different perspectives

Key competencies – from the perspective of ILO

Trevor Riordan, International Labour Office

Key competencies in and across social fields: the employer's perspective

Attilio Oliva, Executive President, Associazione Treelle, Italy

Competencies for civic and political life in democracy

Barbara Fratzak-Rudnicka, Warsaw University

What family life demands – a purposeful view of competent performance

Sondra Stein, National Institute for Literacy, US

Questions from the floor

10.15 – 10.45 Break

SESSION FIVE

Towards a framework for defining and selecting key competencies

10.45 – 11.15

Can a small number of competencies of prime importance for a successful life and effective participation across different fields of life - including economic, political, social, and family domains, public and private interpersonal relations, individual personal development - be identified? If so what is the nature of these competencies and what distinguishes them as key at a general level?

Which competencies or areas of competence are most important in an international context from the viewpoint of policy?

Presentation

Dominique Simone Rychen, DeSeCo Secretariat

11.15 – 12.45

Parallel workshops

Designed to provide an opportunity for feedback on DeSeCo's conceptual work to date, five concurrent workshops will include brief discussant presentations by a scholar invested in the issues surrounding competencies and CCP country representatives.

Chairs include:

Jorma Ahola, Ministry of Education, Finland; François Grin, SRED-DIP, Switzerland; Walo Hutmacher, education consultant, Switzerland; Jay Moskowitz, American Institutes for Research, USA; Claude Sauvageot, Ministry of Education, France.

Discussants

Country representatives from the Country Contribution Process include:

Rita Dunon, Ministry of the Flemish Community, Belgium; Jean-Claude Emin, Ministry of Education, France; Hans Heijke, Maastricht University, Netherlands; Frances Kelly, Ministry of Education, New Zealand; Erik Knain, Norwegian Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education; Reijo Raivola, University of Tampere, Finland, CERI Governing Board; Jenny Soukkan, National Agency for Education, Sweden; Erich Svecnik, Zentrum für Schulentwicklung, Austria; Peter Vogelius, Ministry of Education, Denmark; Ralf Witt, University of Technology, Dresden, Germany.

Scholars working in the area of competence include:

Iddo Gal, University of Haifa, Israel; Eckhard Klieme, German Institute for Educational Research (DIPF); Katharina Maag Merki, FS&S, University of Zurich, Switzerland; Jules Peschar, University of Groningen, The Netherlands; Judith Torney-Purta, University of Maryland, USA

12.45 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 15.15

Parallel workshops continued

Discussion continues and workshop participants assist rapporteurs prepare a summary of findings for presentation to the plenary.

15.15 – 16.15

Reports to the plenary

Rapporteurs include:

Marilyn Binkley, U.S. Department of Education; David H. Fretwell, World Bank, USA; Willem Houtkoop, Max Goote Knowledge Center, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; Rainer Lehmann, Humboldt-University, Berlin, Germany; Gerry Shiel, St. Patrick's College, Ireland

16.15 – 16.45 Break

SESSION SIX

Lifelong learning – development of key competencies

16.45 – 18.00

What are the implications of the concept of competence and key competencies for the lives of individuals and for teaching and learning throughout the life span? What role do different social institutions such as school, family, workplace, the mass media, and religious and cultural organizations play in promoting and fostering key competencies in the population? What is the role of formal education, with its specific institutions and processes?

Presentations

Developing generic competencies in vocational education programs
Andrew Gonczi, University of Technology, Sydney

Development of key competencies for and in lifelong learning
Adama Ouane, UNESCO Institute for Education

Connections between key competencies and social background: Implications for social policy
Douglas Willms, Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy

Questions from the floor

19.30 at the Restaurant *Aux Halles de l'Île* (place de l'Île 1)

Reception hosted by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and *Group dinner*

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2002 (9.00 – 12.00)

Chairperson:

Valena White Plisko, Associate Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education

SESSION SEVEN

Key competencies – moving towards indicators and assessments

9.00 – 11.00

In light of the goal of continuing to broaden the range of competencies covered by comparative international assessments, what new areas of competence should be considered for inclusion?

What are the strategies that might best contribute in the short-, medium-, and long-term to developing internationally comparable assessments and indicators of *key competencies for all*?

What can be learned about key competencies from current international large-scale assessments? What empirical evidence do these studies provide?

Presentations

Key competencies – avoiding the pitfalls of current initiatives

Tim Oates, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, UK

Panel discussion

Moderation:

Laura Salganik, Education Statistics Services Institute, American Institutes for Research

Panelists:

Jean-Claude Emin, Department of Programming and Development, French Ministry of Education

Scott Murray, Statistics Canada

Andreas Schleicher, OECD

Judith Torney-Purta, University of Maryland, USA

11.00 – 11.30 Break

SESSION EIGHT

Conclusions, next steps and adjournment

11.30 – 12.00

Concluding remarks

Heinz Gilomen, Swiss Federal Statistical Office

Documentation

DeSeCo has compiled the following papers to provide input for the symposium:

Rychen D.S. & Salganik L.H. (Eds.). (2001). *Defining and selecting key competencies*. Göttingen : Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.

DeSeCo Discussion Paper (January 2002)

Country Contribution Process: Summary and Country Reports (2001)

Additional DeSeCo Expert Papers (2001):

- Definition and selection of competencies from a human development perspective (Daniel P. Keating)
- Competencies for civic and political life in democracy (Barbara Fratzak-Rudnicka & Judith Torney- Purta)
- Key skills/key competencies – avoiding the pitfalls of current initiatives (Tim Oates)

Contact Information

Further information about the ***content of the symposium***, the symposium program, or the ***DeSeCo Program in general*** can be obtained from:

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Further information about ***organizational and administrative aspects*** related to the symposium, in particular with regard to accommodations and travel issues, can be obtained from:

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Logistical Information

The symposium takes place at the **International Conference Center Varembé** in Geneva, near the UNO's Palais des Nations. The Conference Center can easily be reached from the train station (5 minutes by bus N° 5 or 8) or from the airport (10 minutes by taxi at a cost of approximately SFR. 30.00).

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Further information about the Conference Center Varembé can be found at www.cicg.ch/.