



**UNESCO INTERNATIONAL EXPERT MEETING ON GENERAL  
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:  
TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES**

*Beijing, People's Republic of China,  
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MEETING AGREEMENTS

Section for General Secondary Education  
Division of Secondary, Technical  
and Vocational Education  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MEETING AGREEMENTS**

**The UNESCO international expert meeting on General Secondary Education in the twenty-first century held in Beijing, the People's Republic of China, in May 2001 reached consensus that:**

- **Secondary Education should be given high priority.**
- **The objectives and functions of secondary education need to be redefined for the twenty-first century.**

The meeting then focussed on the major dilemmas Secondary Education is, or will be facing in meeting these redefined objectives and functions. These dilemmas involve the balance between mass and selective schooling, general and specialised (vocational) education and cognitive and behavioural outcomes.

**In respect of mass and selective schooling, consensus was reached that:**

- Countries should continue to be committed to the goal of mass Secondary Education as a minimum in terms of policy and provision.
- Commitment to universal access to Secondary Education as an aspiration should be maintained with efforts to remove barriers and obstacles as well as build on strengths and opportunities especially for girls.
- Serious attention be given to making adequate provision for those not selected into Secondary Education, those who drop out or leave before completing the cycle and those denied access to their preferred streams.
- Where there is not full transition from Primary to Secondary and/or from lower Secondary to upper Secondary, efforts must be made to accommodate all those who are eligible through alternative provisions. Where this is not possible available places should be allocated equitably and transparently.
- Mass access to Secondary Education will require partnership between governments and other providers (private, NGOs, etc.), but governments should seek to safeguard the interests of learners by ensuring quality standards are maintained by all providers.

- The structure of programmes and streaming practices should be reviewed to offer greater flexibility and choice to learners in the selection process, including the option to return to a preferred stream.
- Future orientation at Secondary should be towards greater quality and diversity of what is provided, more flexibility in the organisation of learning and greater responsiveness to the needs and circumstances of learners.

**In respect of general and selective (vocational) education consensus was reached that:**

- The Secondary Education system should focus on links between academic and vocational subjects and their interdependence in the overall education of adolescent learners of both genders.
- Secondary Education is about preparation for life and should reflect the reality of life in the twenty-first century that encompasses a seamless to-and-fro between continued learning and the world of work.
- The nature of vocational subjects, the way in which they are organised and taught, as well as the recognition given to them determine their status in the Secondary school curriculum.
- Secondary Education including Vocational Education needs to address not only the human resource needs of the society but also the development needs and aspirations of the individual.
- There is a strong trend in Secondary Education in most countries to include some element of Vocational Education for all learners. Some countries are experimenting with ways of providing such joint education to different population groups, including migrants, isolated rural populations and learners in regular secondary schools.
- Incorporating Vocational Education into Secondary Education can be expensive resulting in poor quality teaching and a lowering of status of these subjects. Innovative and cost-effective strategies to overcome this problem have included contracting out the teaching of subjects to nearby specialist schools and centres or creating different ways of teaching Vocational disciplines that are less demanding in terms of equipment, materials and practically trained instructors.

- As the trend of life-long learning is becoming clear, Secondary Education is adjusting to this reality by developing flexible structures and varied options in their programmes, as well as having stronger links to the world of work.

**In respect of cognitive and behavioural outcomes, consensus was reached that:**

- There is recognition that traditional academically based education does not adequately address students' needs in terms of realizing their full potential, especially in a context of rapid economic, cultural and social change and gender based discrimination.
- Given the declining role of other socializing agencies schools should take greater responsibility for helping learners acquire life-skills.
- The emerging role of teachers (notably as facilitators), their status, integrity and commitment are essential for implementing life-skills education successfully. The quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training is critical in this regard.
- Teaching methods, school facilities and services should be developed and adapted to provide life-skills/behavioural education.
- The role of Secondary school principals needs to be consistent with this new reality.
- Education decision-makers need to be sensitised to the consequences of their choices based on evidence of such factors as the links between academic success and personal and community well being.
- A multi-sectoral approach involving government ministries, NGOs local communities, etc. is essential for successful implementation of this kind of education.

**Other themes identified by the meeting** that Secondary Education is, or will be, facing in achieving its new objectives and functions included:

- Inclusive and compensatory education.
- Eliminate gender disparities.
- Holistic and participatory education.
- Strengthening equity.
- The effective use of information communications technology.

**The meeting further agreed that the resources and/or strategies needed to respond to the new objectives and functions of Secondary Education and to manage the themes or dilemmas include:**

- Commencing with the view that students are at the centre of any education reform;
- Understanding that there are three interrelated components to support students' learning – the people, whether educational professionals, parents or community members, the educational policies that offer a framework for what students need to learn, and the infrastructure.

Member nations sought UNESCO's assistance in attaining the following in relation to these three interrelated components:

- For students
  - Reconstructing Secondary Education to ensure a consideration of learners' diversified needs and provide them with knowledge and life-long skills including vocational learning;
- For teachers, curriculum and school:
  - Giving priority to teacher education (pre-service and in-service);
  - Ensuring that the curricula present goals and objectives clearly and precisely and reflect local needs – including socio-economic needs;
  - Ensuring schools both understand and have the ability to become learning organisations/ learning communities.
- For infrastructure and policy:
  - Ensuring that policy-makers stress and give enough attention to Secondary Education;
  - Providing access to Secondary Education by providing a place for all learners;
  - Offering appropriate resources for Secondary Education through adequate budget allocations.

**Specific suggestions for future UNESCO activities centred on:**

- Providing written case studies and/or a data base of best/successful practice in Secondary Education with a focus on issues identified at this meeting -
  - Vocational Education,
  - distance learning and information communications technology,
  - life-skills and life-long education,
  - discovery learning,
  - the changing role of teachers and the use of roles other than teachers in schools,
  - pre-service and in-service teacher education and increasing the status of teachers,
  - assessment literacy (ie, having and being able to use assessment with predictive validity) and evidence-informed policy and accountability,
  - capacity building or organisational learning/learning community,
  - whole-of-government approaches to policy and practice,
  - the balance between administrative, budgeting and curriculum centralisation and decentralisation,
  - complementary and alternative provision of resources.
- Organise forums and facilitating international exchange and cooperation in the area of Secondary Education leading to a major World Education Forum on Secondary Education;
- Continue to provide a vehicle for establishing the ideals for Secondary Education in the twenty-first century and for holding governments accountable for moving towards these ideals.