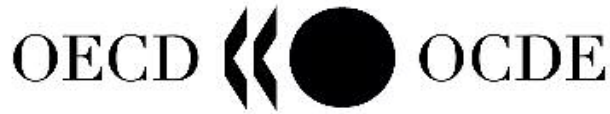


ORGANISATION DE COOPÉRATION ET DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUES



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

DIRECTION DES RELATIONS EXTÉRIEURES ET DE LA COMMUNICATION  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE

Division des Relations extérieures  
Public Affairs Division

Le Chef de Section  
The Head of Section

17 December 2004

Dear colleague,

It is my great pleasure to invite you to participate in the OECD's High Level Parliamentary Seminar on education, which will take place at OECD headquarters in Paris on Wednesday 23 February 2005. The seminar will feature, in particular, the latest results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating countries and administered to 15-year-olds in schools.

The survey, which has had a tremendous impact in those countries which have participated by highlighting the relative strengths and weaknesses of their national school systems, was implemented in 43 countries in the first assessment in 2000. The results have just been published for the second assessment in 2003 involving 41 countries, and at least 58 countries will participate in the third assessment in 2006.

Other pertinent work of the OECD in the area of education such as the internationalization of higher education and the quality of the teaching workforce will be presented to Parliamentarians at the seminar in order to get their views in these areas of OECD work and support in moving the agenda forward. This work aims to help governments and societies provide the highest quality education for children and adults, preparing them for a rich and productive life. And so, I hope that you will be able to join us for this important event.

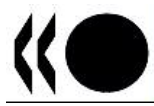
I would be very grateful if you could inform Meggan Dissly [meggan.dissly@oecd.org](mailto:meggan.dissly@oecd.org) by January 31, 2005 as to whether you can accept this invitation.

With my best regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John West', written in a cursive style.

John West



**HIGH LEVEL PARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR ON**  
**EDUCATION**

**23 FEBRUARY 2005**

**AT THE OECD**  
**19, RUE FRANQUEVILLE 75016 PARIS**

**Seminar objectives and organisation**

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in helping governments and societies to improve the quality of education and thereby prepare children for their role in society as responsible productive adults.

The objectives of this seminar will be to:

- share with parliamentarians the OECD's work on education;
- listen to their views on the challenge of implementing the necessary reforms to improve the quality of schools and teaching;
- seek parliamentarians' support for building the necessary political will and momentum to push this agenda forward.

This seminar will be held at OECD headquarters on 23 February, the day following the meeting of the Economic and Social Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Members of this Parliamentary Assembly will be invited to participate, along with a number of other parliamentarians from OECD countries.

The seminar will be held from 10am to 5pm and include a working lunch.

**Background**

More than 250,000 15-year-old students in 41 countries took part in the Programme for International Student Assessment 2003 (PISA), the second three-yearly survey of its kind. The survey involves pencil and paper tests lasting two hours, taken in the students' schools. The main focus in PISA 2003 was on mathematics, but the survey also looked at student performance in problem-solving, science and reading and at students' approaches to learning and attitudes to school.

Finland already led in the PISA 2000 reading assessment, and in PISA 2003 it maintained its high level of reading literacy while further improving its performance in mathematics and science. In mathematics, where the PISA 2003 tests sought to establish how well students can develop and apply mathematical models to deal with real-life tasks and interpret, validate and communicate the results, top-performing OECD countries also include the Netherlands.

Most other countries' relative positions in the PISA 2003 survey remained broadly similar to those in PISA 2000, but some showed notable changes. Poland's overall performance rose thanks to big improvements



among lower-performing students in the wake of a major reform of the education system in 1999. Smaller but still noteworthy improvements in at least two assessment areas also occurred in Belgium, the Czech Republic and Germany.

Some low-performing countries showed only small improvements or actually did less well, widening the gap between the best and poorest performers.

Overall, wealthier countries tend to do better in educational terms than poor nations, but there are exceptions: Korea's national income, for example, is 30 per cent below the OECD average but its students are among the best performers in OECD countries. Nor is high expenditure necessarily a key to success: a number of countries do well in terms of "value for money" in their education systems, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Japan, Korea and the Netherlands, while some of the "big spenders" perform below the OECD average. (Data for the United Kingdom are not included, due to insufficient response rates of students and schools. In PISA 2000, data for the Netherlands were excluded for the same reason).

The results of PISA 2003 suggest that both students and schools perform best in a climate characterised by high expectations that are supported through strong teacher-student relations, students who are ready to invest effort and who show interest and lower levels of anxiety with mathematics, and a positive disciplinary climate. In most of the countries that performed well, local authorities and schools also have substantial responsibility for educational content and/or the use of resources, and many set out to teach heterogeneous groups of learners. Further information on Pisa can be found at [www.oecd.org/pisa](http://www.oecd.org/pisa)

The quality of the teaching workforce is a major consideration in any nation's aspirations for an educational system of high quality. Teachers form the core of the school system and a wide range of research studies has confirmed the importance of teacher quality for student learning. Thus, the development of policies seeking to improve the quality of teachers and ensure that all students receive quality teaching is a central concern for governments.

Teacher policy is currently high on the agenda of OECD countries. Substantial policy initiatives are under way in a range of areas including improving teacher recruitment and supply, reforming initial teacher education and professional development, restructuring teachers' work and careers, and strengthening leadership in schools. In addition to questions about the changing roles of teachers and the attractiveness of teaching overall, there are also important issues concerned with diversification of teachers' roles, more flexible pathways into teaching, incentive structures rewarding the skills and performance that most closely relate to student learning, as well as teacher development and accountability.

Higher education has become increasingly international in the past decade as more and more students choose to study abroad, enrol in foreign education programmes and institutions in their home country, or simply use the Internet to take courses at colleges or universities in other countries. This growth is the result of several different, but not mutually exclusive, driving forces: a desire to promote mutual understanding; the migration of skilled workers in a globalised economy; the desire of the institutions to generate additional revenues; or the need to build a more educated workforce in the home countries, generally as emerging economies.

But the growth and diversification of cross-border education raises a number of questions for governments and higher education institutions. Is capacity being increased to meet growing demand? Is access being widened? Are costs being lowered for students or governments? Is liberalization an answer to the growing importance of private provision as well as the rise in the demand for higher education?