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Fourth Technical Meeting for PIAAC

Opening Remarks

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the BMBF and the OECD, I wish to welcome you to this meeting, the fourth technical meeting related to PIAAC. And I wish to thank the German team – DIE, DIPF and ZUMA for preparing this meeting which highlights some of thinking and work that has been and is going on here in Germany.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the very important role that the OECD plays in creating a forum for international cooperation, especially on projects such as PISA and PIAAC. One only has to look at how successful they have been in creating the appropriate structures for leading the PISA effort to understand the contribution OECD has made in advancing the field of international comparative measurement of skills.

Not only are projects of this type valuable in terms of international comparisons, but also when the international effort is combined with national extensions, as Germany did in PISA, these projects serve as a crucial springboard for important national research and policy work. Both – research and policy – are becoming international, and PIAAC can become another milestone in cooperation. The better the results of this cooperation, the more reliable will comparison be, and the more unquestionable.

Although PIAAC has not yet been launched, the international planning exercises related to this effort have already had an impact on the thinking that is going into the important German national panel work that Mrs. Pahl will discuss later this morning

and which will be carried out independent of PIAAC. Independent, however, does not mean unrelated.

OECD has helped to create this forum for PIAAC in two ways – through the IEG structure and through this series of technical meetings.

The IEG structure has allowed for a more transparent sharing of concerns related to the potential objectives and goals of the PIAAC program.

And, the technical meetings are providing a very powerful opportunity for researchers and methodologists from various countries to publicly discuss the advances that they have made independent of the OECD and each other.

These advances address not only some of the weaknesses in the methodology and implementation of large scale international comparative adult assessments that participating countries experienced in IALS, but also these advances are innovations that will push in improving measurement methodology for both skills assessments and surveys related to participation in the labor force, training programs, etc.

So within this context of open collaboration, and building on the success of PISA, we believe that PIAAC has the potential to become the core of basic theoretical work on the functioning of education systems as it relates to adult education and lifelong learning. This could help to understand how changes in competencies as a result of formal, nonformal and informal education and training relate to the world of work, industry and the social and cultural environment.

To date, insufficient attention seems to have been paid to how to bring together two very important pieces of the picture. The PIAAC plans have focused on establishing an extended set of skills that can be effectively measured. This is an extremely important piece of the puzzle. And, clearly improving this methodology so that it moves forward in eliminating cultural, social, economic and educational system

biases between participation countries would be a substantial achievement. The so-called context variables are of eminent importance for our attempts at explaining the results and differences. PIAAC therefore is in principle an international attempt at measuring theory.

However, that alone is not enough. PIAAC must work toward furthering our understanding of how and when important learning takes place. Answering questions about how and when certain competencies are acquired, and how they change through the course of formal schooling, training and retraining and both informal and nonformal learning would round out the needed information for effective education system policy development.

Skills and competencies are also acquired outside the education and training systems of member countries. How these competencies are acquired is one question. Equally important is a second question: How the individual can and does make use of his/her competencies is a crucial factor for the performance of our economies and society at large.

These two reasons make it essential for broadening our perspective in two directions: the world of work and all other fields of activity and age or age structure.

Talking of age gives rise to two more, politically important issues: How do age cohorts find their way from school to work and active citizenship, from work to continuing education, out of unemployment and from child care back into work and – at last – into retirement?

Second: How do we adapt the skills structure of our aging societies in order to maintain productivity, innovation, but also health and minimizing intergenerational conflicts about social burden sharing?

BMBF has taken the position that to accomplish a task of this magnitude would best be served through longitudinal studies. As early as October 2001 German representatives to the Ed. Comm. made proposals on how a panel approach to adult competence-measurement might be accomplished. In fact, as Mrs. Pahl will explain, this is at the heart of our national strategy for education reporting. We are aware that very few of the potential PIAAC partners are prepared to commit to this course of action. Therefore I see it as crucial that the PIAAC study design makes it possible to integrate data drawn from both cross-sectional and panel samples.

We see the need for an increased emphasis on the inclusion of retrospective information on education and transitions between schooling, work, and participation in adult society at all life stages. Similar to what our French colleagues have already pointed out, this would include developing a much more refined system for capturing information on participation in education systems that vary in substantial ways and are not meaningfully reducible to the current set of ISCED levels. We will also have to accept different modes of vocational education and training, school-based, work-related or dual systems as they have developed historically

To accomplish this goal, it is important that PIAAC move forward now in a timely fashion so that we can reach a consensus on the priorities and objectives for PIAAC and develop an overall study plan that is based on a coherent framework and model

As I recommended at the last Joint Session of the Ed.C. and CERI governing board meeting, it is becoming more and more important that country cooperation becomes more formally structured. To that end, we should discuss how we can actively support a more reliable structure. E. g. 7 could imagine the support to be organized under the auspices of a new Network and/or PIAAC's own BPC so that

- A program of ongoing development could be established,
- The advances developed in a particular country could systematically be turned into bi- and multilateral empirical studies to test whether they do in fact transfer from country to country,

- Researchers could more closely collaborate in the development of the international instruments than has previously been done.
- A shared understanding of what can be built upon and what has to be improved might be turned into priorities for empirical work so that we could collectively target pooled resources.

PISA, IALS and ALL have been steps in the evolution of measurement methodology and have resulted in significant amounts of important and useful comparative data that have helped to shape important international policy discussions. Some of that work was done in the DeSeCo project and other research. Not only should we be considering the pragmatic feasibility issues related to launching this project, but also while PIAAC moves forward we should make certain that it is more theoretically grounded so that it can become a vehicle for basic research as well.

Our program for the next two days has been revised a little bit, as you will have noticed already.

The next speakers for setting the scene both nationally and internationally are Veronika Pahl and Andreas Schleicher / Koji Miyamoto.