

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD – CLEAR SUCCESS FOR THIRTY YEARS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

More than thirty years have passed since an educational state of emergency was proclaimed in most industrialised countries. A major criticism of the educational system was that it was to a large extent the privileged classes who were able to send their children to colleges and universities. It was also criticised that education for girls was not as good as for boys. A social consensus was formed that in the interest of equal starting opportunities access to higher education should be given to everyone with sufficient ability.

The demand for better education for broad strata of the population was in accord with the interest of

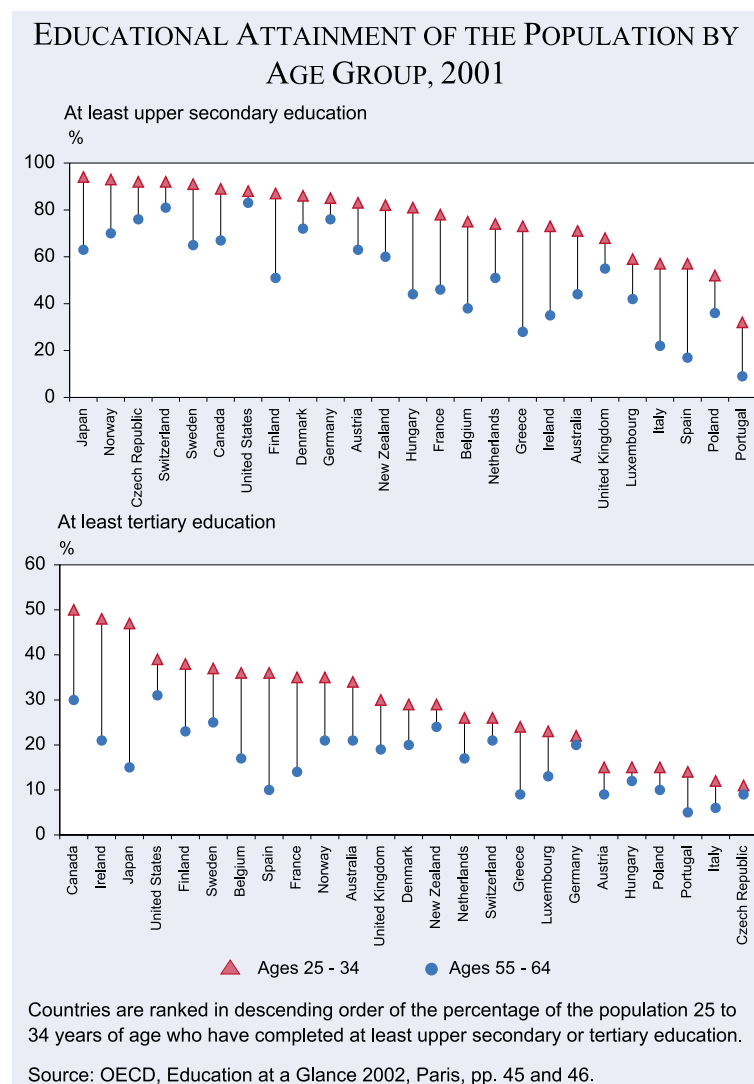
businesses, whose requirements for more highly qualified workers increased. In addition the great importance of human capital was recognised as necessary for economic growth. Correspondingly, the improvement of the educational system met with broad support.

The successes of this past “revolution in education” can be adequately measured thanks to the work of the OECD and EUROSTAT. With the “International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97)” a system has been developed with which the different levels of education in the individual OECD countries can be compared and equivalencies determined. There are also statistics that indicate the proportional educational attainments of the population. These statistics are broken down according to age groups. By means of a comparison of the educational attainments of the 25 to 35 age group with that of the 55 to 64 age group, which concluded its educational phase 30 years ago,

conclusions can be drawn on changes in the educational level over the past three decades.

The newest statistics, for 2001, show that the educational level of the population clearly increased in all OECD-countries in the past 30 years. Three quarters of those in the 25 to 34 age group have at least a higher secondary schooling. For the 55 to 64 age group it is less than half. Countries with a low level of educational attainment in an international comparison have caught up on countries with a traditionally higher educational level. Greece and Spain in particular considerably increased the percentage of people in the 25 to 34 age group with a secondary education. Among the countries with a traditionally higher educational level, Belgium and Finland increased the participation in the educational system considerably (see table and figure).

There was also a clear increase in university graduates. In the stud-



**Educational attainment of the population by age group in percent,
2001**

	At least upper secondary education		At least tertiary education	
	25-34	55-64	25-34	55-64
Austria ^{a)}	83	63	15	9
Belgium ^{a)}	75	38	36	17
Czech Republic	92	76	11	9
Denmark	86	72	29	20
Finland	87	51	38	23
France	78	46	35	14
Germany	85	76	22	20
Great Britain	68	55	30	19
Greece	73	28	24	9
Hungary	81	44	15	12
Ireland ^{a)}	73	35	48	21
Italy	57	22	12	6
Luxembourg	59	42	23	13
Netherlands ^{a)}	74	51	26	17
Norway ^{a)}	93	70	35	21
Poland	52	36	15	10
Portugal	32	9	14	5
Spain	57	17	36	10
Sweden	91	65	37	25
Switzerland	92	81	26	21
Australia	71	44	34	21
Canada	89	67	50	30
Japan	94	63	47	15
New Zealand	82	60	29	24
US	88	83	39	31
a) 2000.				
Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2002, Paris, pp. 37 and 48.				

ied OECD countries, ca. 28 percent of the 25 to 34 age group and ca. 16 percent of the 55 to 64 age group had a university degree in 2001. Japan, Ireland, Spain, France, Canada and Belgium expanded their university education significantly. In all of these countries, more than 30 percent in the 25 to 34 age groups had a university education in 2001. Also in this group were the United States, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Australia and Great Britain.

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