

**DIRECTORATE FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY
COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL POLICY**

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PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING WEBSITE

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In accordance with the Committee's recommendation following the policy discussion on "Enhancing Science Education and Promoting Public Understanding of Science" at the last session, the Secretariat is developing a website on this theme based on information provided by member countries. This document reports on the implementation of the website. It is submitted for information.

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PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE WEBSITE

1. As the follow-up activity to the policy discussion held at the March 2002 meeting of the Committee, a website devoted to “Public Understanding of Science” is being developed by the Secretariat. This site is directly accessible from the front page of the OECD online site on Science and Technology Policy. It provides information based on responses from twelve countries to the Secretariat survey.
2. In line with the discussion at the March meeting, the website features government programmes regarding several aspects of the member governments’ efforts to enhance public understanding of science. These cover recent surveys on public understanding; fostering understanding and interest in science through education and life-long learning including museums and science events; promoting dialogue with scientists; and the use of new media in enhancing public understanding of science.
2. The website compiles short notes on each of the national programmes under these topics. Supplementary information was collected through relevant websites which are referred to and linked to in the articles. The proposed introductory editorial to the website is found in the annex.

ANNEX

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE IN THE OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES

Along with the positive impact on economic growth, rapid scientific advances and technological change have pervasive effects on social structures and the daily life of individuals. Over the years, they have raised both expectations for increased well-being and concerns about possible risks associated with new technologies and adverse effects on the environment. In such a context, social acceptance of new avenues for scientific research increasingly requires a permanent dialogue with an informed civil society. This calls for efforts aimed at a better understanding of S&T related issues by the public at large that should include a stronger emphasis on scientific culture in the curricula of all levels of education, and the promotion of professional careers in science and technology. Also, opportunities to learn about scientific advances throughout one's life and promoting dialogue with scientists would be an added benefit. The website presents recent activities developed in member countries on the following aspects related to public understanding of science:

- Results of surveys on recent trends in public understanding of science.
- Fostering scientific curiosity and understanding in primary and secondary education.
- New approaches in higher education to attract young people to studies and careers in science.
- Enhancing life-long learning about science: museums, science festivals and science weeks.
- Promoting dialogue between scientists and engineers and the public.
- Using new information and communication technology for public understanding of science.

The information illustrates the great variety of ways that member governments go about enhancing public understanding of science. Although there are differences across countries, the public generally show a broad interest in science. However an increased effort in making people better informed of the developments in science and technology worthy of their interest is in need. Many of the programmes are targeted at the younger generations, in the attempt to improve and complement the education in science they receive. These efforts range from teacher training to developing better materials, even interactive demonstrations in a truck. Scientific exhibitions and events now take place in many countries. They have become more interactive – with other people, using hands-on exhibitions or the new media. Complex issues that scientific progress raises are best understood through direct dialogue with scientists and engineers. Governments now sponsor programmes that give public the opportunity to discuss developments in science and technology directly with specialists. Wherever possible the new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet are mobilised to aid in the dialogue and enhance the understanding of science. Industry and other private organisations increasingly partner with the government in these programmes.