



Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the summer edition of the LIFE newsletter! We begin with a report by alumna Emily Messersmith that is likely to be useful to everyone on the job market—it provides excellent advice on candidates' behavior in job interviews.

Once more, we encourage alumni to consider applying for the LIFE Outstanding Alumni Award. If you are eligible (see p. 6), please send your application package to Imke Kruse by September 15! The awardee will be invited to the Spring Academy 2018 to be held in Berlin from May 30 to June 4.

Berlin fellow Mila Stanewa has spent 4 months in Paris doing an internship at the OECD. Her report gives interesting insights into an important international institution. It is followed by two fellows' impressions of their first academy, the Spring Academy held at UM in Ann Arbor (see below!). Marko Katana's and Jess Kansky's lively account is complemented by the photographs taken by Yasmin Cole-Lewis and Toni Muffel throughout this issue.

A successful bid for funding by LIFE fellows has led to a workshop on open science that will be held before the next academy in Zurich. Make a note of the date (see p. 14)!

In response to fellows' requests for more information on LIFE exchanges, the speakers at the four sites have summarized how to plan a visit and what they can offer incoming LIFE fellows.

Bethany Teachman from UVA gives us her answers to the 10 questions we ask faculty. She provides very interesting information on her approach to clinical psychology. Adriene Beltz and Laura Zahodne then introduce themselves as two new UM LIFE faculty. Welcome!

Finally, we have new LIFE publications, mainly by fellows but also by alumni, as well as the latest LIFE news. Fellows and alumni, please remember to keep us posted about your news!

Julia Delius



Table of Contents

Editorial	1
Talking About Oneself in a Job Interview	3
Emily E. Messersmith	
Announcement of LIFE Outstanding Alumni Award 2017	6
A LIFE Fellow in Paris	8
Mila Staneva	
LIFE Spring Academy 2017 at UM: New Fellows' Report	12
Marko Katana & Jessica Kansky	
Save the Date for a Workshop on Open Science	14
LIFE Exchanges: How to Arrange a Research Stay at Another LIFE Site	15
10 Questions	17
Bethany Teachman	
New LIFE Faculty in Ann Arbor	20
LIFE-Related Publications	21
LIFE News.....	24

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A LIFE Fellow in Paris

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This spring, I had the opportunity to gather some first insights into the world outside of academia through an internship at the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in Paris. I was assigned to the Policy Advice and Implementation Division of the Directorate for Education and Skills there. If you have never heard of the OECD, then you are at least familiar with some of the products of its Education and Skills Directorate. It is where PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment), Education at Glance, and PIAAC (the Survey of Adult Skills) are produced, to name just a few of the many projects in the Directorate. The project I was working on is Education GPS—a website that provides the public with enhanced and easy access to OECD education data and policy research: <http://gpseducation.oecd.org>. It is run by Jean Yip—a senior analyst with a long experience at the Organisation, and her terrific team—Pedro Garcia De Leon, Florence Wojtasinski, and Marie Sirgant. They were all extremely friendly, hospitable, and supportive and I had a great time working with them. The preparation and organization of the internship

also went really smoothly thanks to the support of LIFE and my team at the DIW Berlin. Particularly my supervisor, Katharina Spieß, and Silke Schäfer were very helpful, by arranging that I could interrupt my LIFE stipend for the period I spent at the OECD. In this way, I was able to save my PhD time and funding exclusively for the thesis. The internship was funded by the OECD and the ERASMUS program of the FU Berlin. The European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) is a European Union (EU) student exchange program established in 1987.

The OECD and the Directorate for Education and Skills

The OECD is a huge intergovernmental organization with more than 3000 employees. It is based in Paris and was founded in 1948 to administer the financial aid from the Marshall Plan. In 1960, after the Marshall Plan was over, it turned to an economic forum for sharing policy experiences from various policy areas and providing high-quality, evidence-based policy advice. One of the major tasks of the organization is to gather diverse inter-



An OECD meeting room.

nationally comparable data and develop international indicators on different issues, ranging from tax to education. Such indicators and statistics are used worldwide for country comparisons and rankings and, therefore, set the standards for evaluating countries' performance in different areas.

Over the years, the range of topics covered by the Organisation has expanded. Nowadays, the OECD consists of 24 directorates, each responsible for a different policy area. For example, there is a Directorate for Environment, another one is focused on public governance, there is a Directorate for Employment and Labour, and one working on nuclear energy. For the LIFE fellows the Directorate for Education and Skills is probably of greatest interest, since its work is more closely related to our research interests.

The Directorate for Education and Skills was founded some years ago and was previously part of the Directorate for Employment and Labour. To date, it employs approximately 200 people. It is headed by Andreas Schleicher, a German who previously worked for the TIMSS project (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) at the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in Hamburg. The Directorate has four Divisions: Early Childhood and Schools, Skills Beyond School, Policy Advice and Implementation, and Innovation and Measuring Progress. Each Division consists of 50 to 60 employees working in smaller teams of 5 to 15 people.

The Division for Early Childhood and Schools (ECS) is the biggest division in the Directorate. It includes among others the projects PISA and TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey). PISA, as many of you know, is an international assessment

of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading, and science. To date, it covers 72 countries and economies. Apart from the assessment of academic performance, PISA regularly includes additional thematic surveys, for example, on students' well-being, financial literacy, or their activities outside of school. Besides the core PISA team, two additional teams work on important extensions of the project. PISA for Development aims at adapting the main survey instruments for the context of developing countries, while PISA for Schools is targeted at particular schools rather than educational systems. TALIS is another big project in the Division, probably of great interest to the educational researchers among the LIFE fellows. The project focuses on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers at the secondary school level in more than 40 countries around the world. The next round of TALIS in 2018 will include a first-of-its-kind video study, where the practices and processes taking place in the classroom will be observed. The aim is to obtain internationally comparative data on teaching practices, which can advance the research on teaching effectiveness. Both TALIS and PISA data are available for scientific purposes.

As its name suggests, the Skills Beyond School (SBS) Division focuses on education beyond the secondary level. Thus, there is one team working on higher education and another team working on vocational education and training. Another important team runs the PIAAC project. PIAAC is an international survey conducted in over 40 countries. It measures key cognitive and workplace skills of adults aged 16 to 65. Its aims are to assess how skills are used at work and to examine which skills are needed for individuals to participate successfully in the labor market and for economies to prosper. Other important projects, closely connected to PIAAC, are the National Skills Strategy and the Skills Analysis. The National Skills Strategy studies the unique context and educational challenges in particular countries and helps them to promote better skills policies and foster lifetime employability. The Skills Analysis team prepares a thematic review on skills-related policies and trends around the world—the Skills Outlook (see OECD 2017c).

The Policy Advice and Implementation Division (PAI) co-ordinates the provision of advice and rec-



Part of the OECD building in the center of Paris.



The Chateau, the OECD's headquarters.

ommendations on educational policies to OECD members and other countries. Most of the work in this division consists of preparing country reviews and education policy studies that cover a wide range of topics and educational sectors, from early childhood education and care to higher education. The work is based on an in-depth analysis of a country's strengths and weaknesses, empirical research, and collaboration with relevant actors and stakeholders, such as national ministries and international experts. However, some of the work focuses on a particular topic rather than on a single country. One good example for this is the recently published review *"The Funding of School Education"* (OECD, 2017a), which provides an extensive overview of the governance, planning, and evaluation of the use of funds in the secondary sector. Another project in the division is Education GPS that I will present later.

Finally, the Innovation and Measuring Progress Division (IMEP) is responsible for reviewing the current state of education by providing system level indicators on countries' performance. Its core annual publication, which is also the most frequently cited OECD publication, is *Education at a Glance (EAG)* (OECD, 2016). EAG provides a rich set of internationally comparable indicators on educational systems—for example, on investments in education, access to and participation rates in education, graduation rates, teachers' salaries, or class sizes.

Overall, the Directorate for Education and Skills is interesting and diverse, not only in terms of its work and the variety of topics, but also with respect to the people working there. I met sociologists and economists, psychologists and educational re-

searchers, even former teachers, from all over the world. Some of them had a research background, others worked for their national governments, and many also had experience in the private sector.

My Work at the OECD

During my stay at the OECD, I assisted Jean Yip's team in the development of the Education GPS website. One of the great advantages of working on Education GPS is that one gets a very good overview over the entire scope of the Directorate for Education and Skills' work, since the website summarizes and presents most of the projects conducted there. It gathers and links (1) quantitative OECD data and information on education; and (2) OECD research on education policies. Users can access and extract OECD data, research, and policy advice according to their individual needs and selected criteria. All of the information is available by topic and by country through an Education Indicator Explorer, an Education Policy Explorer, and a Country Profiles Factory.

At the beginning of the internship, I participated in several workshops organized by my team, where I was trained how to integrate new information into the website and use the software required for this. Later, I worked on updating the Education Indicator Explorer strand of the project. The tasks were more "technical," including the integration of major indicators from the last PISA publications, solving technical problems related to this, checking the data for consistency. Apart from that, I participated in major events at the OECD and the Directorate for Education and Skills in order to get to know the organization better. One such event was

the Education Policy Committee Meeting, where the Directorate presented its current work to representatives of the participating countries. Another one was a workshop, organized by the PISA team, where the study was presented in detail and participants were trained to work with the data in several hands-on sessions.

Another part of my work was to contribute to the development of the Education Policy Explorer strand of the project. This included a review of the latest OECD reports on education, such as *"PISA 2015 Results: Students' Well-Being"* (OECD, 2017b), *"Skills Outlook 2017"* (OECD, 2017c), and *"The Funding of School Education"* (OECD, 2017a), and a summary of their key insights and policy recommendations. Furthermore, I developed several new topics on education for the website, such as "Financial Literacy," "Curriculum and Instruction Time," and "Student Engagement and Motivation." For this, I reviewed the OECD's previous work on these subjects and drafted short articles based on this information.

Life in Paris

Paris, of course, was the best part of the experience. It is definitely the most beautiful city I have seen. It offers so many museums and so much culture that the whole four-month internship was not enough to see even the half of it. I explored a lot and learned a lot. My colleagues also contributed much to the great experience. We often had drinks together after work, visited fancy restaurants, or explored the Paris night life. The OECD was also very concerned with the well-being of its staff. It offered different cultural, social, or sports activities. I participated in several guided tours through the city and also took part in the female football tournament, where my team won silver. The highlight was the OECD summer party, which took part in July in the Chateau, the OECD's headquarters,



The OECD summer party at the Chateau.

and was impressive in terms of the food and wines provided and the number of guests who attended.

All in all, my internship in Paris was a terrific and unforgettable experience. I made a lot of friends at the Organization, but also outside of it. My work with the GPS team was very interesting, diverse, and enriching. It allowed me to broaden my perspective on education by gathering insights into completely new topics and meeting people with very different backgrounds.

References

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