

Vocational Education and Training in China

Strengths, Challenges and Policy Options

STRENGTHS

Many strengths are apparent in the Chinese system for vocational education and training in upper secondary schools. The strengths include:

- The establishment of 9 year schooling with almost all children in China now completing lower secondary education.
- A rapidly increasing number of young people now stay on in upper secondary education – now around three quarters of the cohort, and fast increasing numbers of young people in tertiary education. At upper secondary level about half the cohort (as a matter of policy) enter upper secondary vocational schools – with more than 20 million students now in vocational schools.
- A strong and simple model for upper secondary vocational education – involving a range of specialisms, a good percentage of general academic skills underpinning all the programmes, and a commitment to workplace training and close relationships with employers.
- Upper secondary education typically requires fees, but the government has introduced a number of measures, both at national and provincial level to try to overcome financial barriers and ensure that as many students stay on in school – this includes a national scheme to offer a CNY 1500 (Yuan renminbi) per year subsidy to students in VET schools, largely covering their fees, and from 2009 an initiative to make tuition free for upper secondary vocational school students.
- China has strong arrangements to ensure that teachers in vocational schools remain abreast of the requirements of modern industry. Teachers in vocational schools are required to spend one month in industry each year, or two months every two years. In addition, many schools employ a significant number of part-time teachers who also work in industry.

CHALLENGES

Workplace training:

- Workplace training is actively encouraged by government subsidies and current policy is that each student should spend one year on workplace training during their upper secondary programme. But co-operation with employers is variable. But there are few quality standards for workplace training and few regional, sectoral or national bodies to engage employers and link them to the VET system.

Resources and standards:

- While there are some compensatory arrangements, to a great extent the resources of any school depend on the resources of the province and county/district of which they are part. Given China's rapid but uneven economic development, the effect is to leave schools in some rural areas and poorer provinces under-resourced. There are few clear minimum standards for vocational schools in terms of equipment, teachers and so on. While there are some national guidelines, they are only implemented where resources are available. One of the main standards is that of 'key national schools', but this appears, by design, to require resources not available to most schools.

Planning and co-ordination:

- Planning to meet labour market needs is insufficient. Provinces manage some schools directly through the education commission, some through other government bodies such as the agriculture bureau, while many schools are also managed at district and county level. This creates a formidable co-ordination problem. On the demand side, data on labour market demands are often lacking.

AMONG THE REPORT'S POLICY OPTIONS

Workplace training:

- Create a standard expectation of a minimum period of workplace training as an element in upper secondary vocational education and training.
- Consider carefully the use of financial incentives taking into account the limited evidence of useful impact.
- Develop a standard agreement or contract for workplace training to confirm the rights and obligations of trainees and training firms.
- Establish standards for workplace training in consultation with employers.
- Encourage local associations of training firms to manage and support workplace training offers for vocational schools.
- Develop mechanisms to engage employers at regional and sectoral level to plan provision, agree curricula and support workplace training.

Resources and standards:

- Overall expenditure on education, including VET, should be increased, as recommended in previous OECD reviews of China.
- Given big regional discrepancies in available funding on education, extra resources should be allocated to the poorest localities in order to remove financial barriers to participation in VET and to improve its quality. Mechanisms to this end might include:
 - Centrally allocated per capita funding support for upper secondary education, provided by the national government directly to the counties where upper secondary (including VET provision) is most limited, and where quality (measured in terms of teacher indicators such as pupil-staff ratio and teacher qualifications) is weakest.
 - More fundamentally, enhanced fiscal transfers to ensure a stronger funding base for education at provincial and county level.
- Establish minimum quality standards for schools that all regions of China and all schools can reasonably aim for, instead of, or in addition to, the standards of key national schools. Such quality standards might be linked to resource reallocation.

Planning and co-ordination:

- Provide a mix of VET programmes that reflect both student preferences and employer needs.
- Develop planning arrangements to manage the mix of skills provision in consultation with employers while recognising the information challenges.
- Use workplace training and employer willingness to provide it as a guide to the appropriate mix of provision.
- Improve co-ordination in the provision of VET across different levels of government and VET providers.

FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. Options for China](#) (OECD, 2010) was released in June 2010.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs