

Vocational Education and Training in Korea

Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

- The level of educational attainment among young people is very high: 97% of 25-to-34-year-olds have completed upper secondary education and 53% have tertiary education.
- Education is highly valued by all parts of Korean society.
- 15-year-olds perform very well in numeracy, literacy and science, as illustrated by PISA results.
- The government is committed to increasing employer involvement in VET policy development and implementation, as illustrated by the recent creation of sector councils and Meister schools.
- The tertiary VET sector is well developed; around 32% of tertiary students are enrolled in junior colleges and polytechnic colleges.

CHALLENGES

- VET institutions often see themselves as having a largely academic orientation but they are expected to provide job-ready recruits for industry. This is a dilemma.
- School-industry partnerships are typically established to satisfy the needs of local firms rather than to provide broader occupation-specific and transferable skills. Beyond such local initiatives, there is little employer engagement in the initial VET system.
- Notwithstanding the broad guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), individual VET institutions typically develop their curricula and provide the qualifications for meeting labour market needs. This leads to a duplication of effort.
- Workplace training is not systematically provided in VET programmes and quality standards for workplace training are weak.
- VET teachers have strong academic and pedagogical preparation, but often lack practical work experience in their field.
- Co-ordination among ministries responsible for VET policy is weak.
- VET degrees obtained in high schools and junior colleges are not systematically aligned with the national technical qualifications (and underlying standards).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide an institutional framework for enhancing industry participation in VET. Under the framework, permanent bodies should engage industry stakeholders at all levels in the development and implementation of VET policy. All relevant ministries should be represented in these bodies.
2. Improve the provision, quality and relevance of initial workplace training by strengthening incentives for partnerships between VET institutions and firms and by developing and implementing quality standards.
3. Encourage newly-recruited VET teachers to have relevant prior work experience particularly for high school VET. Require all VET institutions to ensure that VET teachers regularly update their skills in the vocational area, including their knowledge of technologies and working practices.
4. Derive the vocational part of the curriculum used by VET institutions from, or at least adapt it to, national technical standards of high quality which are relevant to industry needs. Students should be able to obtain two certificates: a graduation degree from a VET institution; and a technical qualification based on a national technical qualification (NTQ) examination. Given mixed evidence on the effectiveness of current NTQs, NTQs should be evaluated by the Ministry of Labour (and reformed if necessary).

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. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

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 Policies, Korea](#) (OECD, 2009) was released in May 2009 and assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of four policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

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