



## Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training in Korea Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

- Education is highly valued in Korean society. While this has some drawbacks, it has also contributed to the rise in upper secondary enrolment rates. Korean students have high educational aspirations and a high share of young people progress into tertiary education (OECD, 2011).<sup>1</sup>
- Entrants to postsecondary programmes have strong literacy and numeracy skills, as indicated by PISA results. Korea also performs very well in terms of educational equity (OECD, 2010).<sup>2</sup>
- There is a good research base on postsecondary vocational education and training (VET). The Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) conducts research that supports the development and implementation of VET policies.
- There are various surveys that provide useful information on transition from school to work, the outcomes of education and training programmes and the labour market. These surveys include the Graduates Occupational Mobility Survey, the Youth Panel Survey, the High School Graduates Occupational Mobility Survey and the Occupational Employment Statistics.
- Policy making is dynamic and aims to address many key challenges, as illustrated by the recent introduction of formula funding in junior colleges, measures concerning poor performing postsecondary institutions and the ongoing development of the national competency standards.
- The postsecondary education system is in principle well-articulated, allowing students to continue from a postsecondary VET programme to a university degree with recognition of the credits obtained – although some challenges remain, such as the co-ordination of curricula.

### CHALLENGES

- Various indicators suggest that there is a mismatch in terms of skills and education between postsecondary VET provision and labour market needs. While some of the origins of mismatch are rooted in culture and tradition, some features of the Korean education and training system also contribute to the challenge.
- Links between the VET system and industry and business are generally weak, including at national policy making level. This makes it harder to develop policies that help the VET system to meet rapidly changing labour market needs.
- Junior colleges offer programmes of variable and sometimes low quality. While the government has introduced various policy measures to tackle this, some challenges remain such as weaknesses in quality assurance mechanisms.
- Junior college degrees do not seem to adequately signal skills to employers, partly due to the lack of rigorous assessments of students before graduation. National (technical) qualifications also face a problem of recognition in the labour market. In addition, degree programmes are currently not linked to national qualifications – a challenge that has been recognised by the Korean government.

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1 . OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/eag-2011-en  
2 . OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes (Volume II)*, PISA, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264091504-en

- Provision in junior colleges is driven by student preferences and not systematically balanced by signals of labour market needs. In addition, student choices may not be sufficiently well-informed, as high-quality information on the labour market prospects offered by different options is lacking.
- Participation in workplace training is optional in junior college programmes. Participation rates in workplace training vary and are often low. When workplace training does take place, arrangements to assure its quality are weak and students do not always obtain credits for the time spent in companies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Take action to address systemic weaknesses in the way skills needs are signalled and how the VET system responds to those needs. Provide a package of mutually reinforcing measures to improve the capacity of the postsecondary VET system to meet the skills needs of the economy.
2. Promote industry involvement in VET through a high profile national body, which includes all industry, government and other stakeholders and has either a very influential advisory role or decision-making power in relation to VET policy.
3. Improve quality assurance in junior colleges by:
  - revising quality indicators used in funding allocation and accreditation to better reflect aspects of quality relevant to vocational programmes;
  - revising mandatory requirements for junior college programmes;
  - improving steering instruments that encourage continuous quality improvement.
4. Make degrees more transparent to potential employers and improve efficiency in the VET system by:
  - ensuring that curricula in junior college follow common (national) standards;
  - conducting systematic and rigorous assessments of learning outcomes in junior college programmes;
  - linking junior college programmes and degrees to national competency standards and national (technical) qualifications whenever relevant.
5. Improve the responsiveness of VET provision to labour market needs by:
  - further enhancing career information available to prospective students;
  - balancing student choice with signals of employer needs in junior colleges.
6. Make workplace training mandatory in junior college programmes. Ensure that workplace training is supported by quality standards and a clear legal framework.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Increasingly countries look beyond secondary school to more advanced qualifications to provide the skills needed in many of the fastest growing technical and professional jobs in OECD economies. The OECD study, *Skills beyond School*, is addressing the range of policy questions arising, including funding and governance, matching supply and demand, quality assurance and equity and access. The study will build on the success of the previous OECD study of vocational education and training *Learning for Jobs* which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Full country policy reviews are being conducted in Austria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (with case studies of Florida, Maryland and Washington State). Shorter exercises leading to an OECD country commentary will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Iceland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and in Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Background reports will be prepared in all these countries, and in France, Hungary and Mexico.

[A Skills beyond School Review of Korea, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training](#) (Kis, V. and E. Park, 2012) was published on 4 September 2012.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/education/vet](http://www.oecd.org/education/vet)

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3. OECD (2012), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD Publishing. Doi: 10.1787/9789264177338-en