Reporting from Beijing: China Announces *Modern Vocational Education Development Strategy 2014 – 2020*

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**Summary**

China’s vocational education development strategy 2014 – 2020 outlines the roadmap for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the next 6 years. Highlights include:

- **Universities of applied sciences** are added to the tertiary TVET education to offer bachelor level vocational education. Transitional options are offered at both upper secondary level and at the tertiary level.

- **Provincial governments** are to play a central coordinator role in local TVET developments.

- **Industry** is defined to be a key provider of TVET. Company engagement in all aspects of TVET is to be institutionalized and legislated.

- The **National Vocational Students Skill Competition** is expected to attract international participants, to increase international impact and to serve as an entry point for international cooperation on TVET.

This report is a follow up on the report *China towards Dual Track Education* which was based on a speech by Vice Minister of Education LU Xin’s at the China Development Forum in March 2014. The policies announced in this speech have now officially been published by the Ministry of Education, slightly modified, in the *Modern Vocational Education Development Strategy 2014 – 2020*.

**The official roadmap for “dual track” education in China**

The development strategy draws a roadmap for China’s dual track education which expresses the government’s commitment to strengthen the vocational education career track.

Currently, 45% of junior high school graduates (end of the 9 year compulsory education in China) enter the professional career track, while 55% follow high school education towards an academic university. The strategy sets a goal to reach a ratio of **50%:50%** in the near future. The ratio of students of professional higher education, i.e. VET colleges, universities (professional master programs) and universities of applied sciences (UAS) who already have professional experience is currently at only 5%, but is expected to increase to **20%** by 2020.

According to the strategy, the **priority areas** for vocational education lie in modern agriculture, advanced manufacturing, service industry², strategic industries, energy³, transportation⁴, ocean industry⁵, social management⁶ and creative & culture industry.

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² Priorities are financing service, modern logistics, business service, social service (esp.: elderly care), high-tech service and healthcare service.
New Player: University of Applied Sciences

One key point of the reform is to establish a new type of university, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), who issue Bachelor degrees in professional education; transition options between the vocational and academic career track will be streamlined. UAS are mentioned in the strategy as “a key component of the higher education sector, equal with academic universities,” but “administated separately and differently.”

As the strategy states, universities that aim at “providing labor force to the service industry and supporting local economic development” are encouraged to transform themselves into Universities of Applied Sciences. Target of the reform are mainly the about 600 local universities affiliated to provincial and municipal governments, although central universities “shall not be excluded”, according to an official press conference with Mr. GE Daokai, Director of the Department of Vocational Education at the Ministry of Education. It is yet unclear how many of them will be transformed and how fast this will happen. Reform could start small by piloting with one or several academic departments. As an alternative, academic universities can work with UAS and vocational colleges to develop joint education programs.

Vocational colleges and UAS will be granted more autonomy in testing and admitting students. A separate examination and admission system will be implemented for UAS (details to be announced). Possible options include admission through “knowledge + skill” test (the so called...

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3 Priorities are new energy, renewable energy, environmental protection, energy efficiency, pollution control and disposal and recycling.
4 Priorities are railway communication, civil aviation, public transportation.
5 Priorities are ocean petrol and gas industry, fishery, transportation, tourism, equipment manufacturing.
6 Priorities are community service, community building and public service.
7 Transition between the two tracks are currently possible but too complicated to be a feasible option for most students.
“Professional Gaokao”), admission through Gaokao + GPA, admission through individual application and direct enrollment for outstanding students (winners of the national skill competition).

According to Mr. GE Daokai, pilot reform on admission has already been successfully implemented: “In the year 2013, 1.44 million students were admitted to vocational colleges without taking part in gaokao, accounting for 43% of the overall admitted students of vocational colleges that year.”

The first group of universities will start with Pilot reform projects towards becoming a UAS within the year. Selection of pilot projects will be based on a university's own initiative, provincial government support and Ministry of Education assessment.

**De-centralisation: Provincial Governments to Play a Key Role**

The development strategy has a clear signal to de-centralize TVET and put provincial governments primarily in charge, on account that TVET should be in line with regional economic and social development.

Central government will lead in overall planning, legislating and inter-ministerial coordination of TVET development. This includes publishing a list of professions, relevant standards for curriculum development and a resource pool of course materials. A recent priority of the Ministry of Education is to push provincial governments to establish mandatory funding for the TVET sector based on the number of students in TVET.

Provincial governments will be left with greater financial flexibility on how to spend their TVET budget. They would have more autonomy in adapting central guidelines according to local circumstances, especially on accrediting and assessing TVET schools, identifying prioritized provincial list of professions taught in schools, using localized course materials and designing local curricula based on cooperation with local industries.

De-centralization also comes with more autonomy for vocational schools. Besides increasing autonomy and flexibility in student admission, schools are encouraged to draft school charters and to establish board and industry advisory groups, aiming for better governance, less government intervention but more community engagement. More than 50% of the board and advisory group members should be from industry, local citizen committees and employers.

**New Responsibilities: Companies as Key Provider of TVET**

Traditionally, Chinese students in vocational track are enrolled full time in TVET schools which train them in classrooms and school-based practice labs, and send them to a partner company for an internship, usually at the end of the study. Companies are largely detached from the actual learning process.

The Chinese government has been calling for companies to engage more in both the classroom training and in-the-job training of students for many years. In the development strategy, privatization of TVET sector is advocated to further increase and legitimate the industry's role in TVET. TVET schools are no longer strictly government-owned but open for companies, industry association and other beneficiaries to invest in, for both non-profit and for-profit purposes. Private investment in the form of full ownership, share-holding and joint ventures with TVET schools are all welcomed. Companies and industry associations are allowed to purchase or rent failing public TVET schools. For profit private TVET schools are even allowed to seek venture capital investment in the market.

To further motivate company participation, companies with specific skilled labor demands are encouraged to outsource such needs to local TVET schools by setting up a customized curriculum. “Joint admission & training” is to be piloted where both companies and schools will have a say in admitting students to such a program and will co-develop the curriculum.

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The model of non-full time programs in TVET schools, meaning a blended study model of “apprenticeship in company + classroom education” such as we know from Switzerland, is also mentioned and likely to expand, giving companies more possibility to train the students throughout the study period while benefiting from their work.

The strategy sets the goal that more than 80% of large and medium sized companies will become “providers of TVET services” by 2020 in one of the above-mentioned ways. The strategy mentions the option that supporting TVET for employees will not only be institutionalized, but will also become a legal responsibility of companies. Other incentives for private or partially private TVET schools include direct government stipends, tax incentives, commitment of government service outsourcing contracts, availability of student loans and scholarships, etc. The government also commits to “equal treatment” for public and private TVET schools.

International Cooperation: Targets and Priorities

Ministerial level TVET policy dialogues with Germany, UK and Netherland have been announced, together with additional plans to expand TVET cooperation with the U.S., Australia, African and South American countries (partner countries are not yet disclosed). Cooperation and exchange between Chinese vocational colleges and American community colleges is to be facilitated. Project-based cooperation on TVET with the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF are also listed as a priority for 2014. In response to the establishment of the policy dialogue, the Netherlands have recently created the position of an Education Counsellor at the Embassy in Beijing in charge of TVET.

A UAS Association (China Alliance of Universities of Applied Sciences CAUAS11) has been functioning since 2013, currently with 45 member universities. It is encouraged to establishing contact and strengthening communication with UAS Unions and Associations abroad.

For individual schools, bilateral “Sister school” partnerships are the preferred cooperation model. They shall allow Chinese schools to “systematically study TVET school governance” and to do research on best practices of UAS administration abroad, including accreditation standards, curriculum development, faculty quality control, infrastructure and quality assessment. As a pilot project, the China–UK cooperation on vocational education includes a shadow principle program that has already started.

To promote mutual understanding and facilitate further cooperation, the National Vocational Students Skills Competition, currently the most prestigious domestic skill competition, will seek more international visibility.

A new goal in internationalization of TVET is to support Chinese enterprises’ global expansion. Chinese companies that have been contracted to work on large scale projects overseas are encouraged to work closely with Chinese and/or foreign TVET schools in providing technical education.

Comment

The central government’s commitment to improve the quality of vocational education is obvious. Adding bachelor level vocational education and institutionalizing industry involvement on all aspects of TVET are probably the two most consequential policies of the development strategy. Encouraging privatization of TVET is new for China and will most probably raise quality concerns -- quality control measures and reaction of the job market towards the graduates will be crucial for their success.

International cooperation is strongly encouraged by the government and desired by the TVET schools. Identifying reciprocity and complementarity, however, are the keys to facilitate cooperation. Faculty training and know-how transfer on UAS management, standard setting and quality assessment are critical topics for Chinese TVET schools; the benefits for their international

11 http://www.auas.org.cn/lmgk/lmzc.htm
counterparts when working with China are for the moment less obvious – a concern of which Chinese policymakers seem to be aware of.

It seems that China intends to use the National Vocational Students Skills Competition as an entry platform to attract international counterparts and to kick-off cooperation.

Sources

The analysis is based on the following official documents

- State Council's Decision on *Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education* (19/2014), announced on June 22nd\(^\text{12}\)
- A powerpoint presentation from Vice Minister LU Xin\(^\text{14}\), speaking at the National Vocational Education and Adult Education conference on March 25th.
- An official interview organized by the State Council Press Office on June 26th to announce vocational education development strategy 2014-2020\(^\text{15}\)

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