

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN CHINA

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Executive Summary

1. In the 2000s, the Chinese government identified vocational education and training (VET) as a weak area that should be promoted and strengthened. The Xi Jinping leadership continues to emphasise the importance of VET as one of the key pillars of national competitiveness.
2. In 2014, China issued a plan for VET development (2014-2020). The enrolment expansion has slowed down. Nonetheless, China will be operating one of the world's largest VET systems, with a projected total enrolment of 14.8 million for tertiary vocational education in 2020.
3. A key reform is to add universities of applied sciences (UAS) as a new type of tertiary vocational schools. Over 600 academic universities—over half of the total—will be transformed into UAS. Eventually, three quarters of Chinese universities/colleges will be UAS and vocational colleges.
4. Another reform is to have two types of College Entrance Examination, one for technically inclined students and the other for academic ones. In connection, there will be multiple educational pathways linking different levels and tracks of education.
5. Meanwhile, China hopes to shift from a school-based system to a dual system in which vocational schools partner enterprises through “joint admission and training”. It resembles the model of “apprenticeship in company + classroom education” found in Germanophone countries.
6. The plan encourages Chinese schools to establish “one-to-one partnership” with foreign schools. It also encourages Chinese companies undertaking large-scale projects overseas to work with Chinese vocational schools to train workers and technicians for China's “Go Global” strategy.

7. As over 80% of secondary vocational school students are from the rural areas, the government's plan to improve the quality of vocational education makes both a good economic policy and a good social policy.
8. Despite generally low prestige, graduates from the vocational education track are not falling far behind in the labour market. The employment rate is high, along with an ever growing average wage, thanks to favourable conditions created by China's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.
9. The situation has begun to change. China is in a transition from a labour-intensive economy to a skill- and capital-intensive one, and from hyper growth to medium-high growth. This development has implications for employment creation, and government funding and operation of vocational schools.
10. As the majority of secondary vocational schools in the central and western regions are often underfunded and underperforming, how to improve the quality and market relevance of these schools is of critical importance to China's VET development agenda (2014-2020).