



JAPAN¹

1. Overview

Education in Japan follows a 6-3-3-4 tier system, comprising six years of compulsory elementary education, three years of junior high school (lower secondary) education, three years of high school (upper secondary) education (meaning that secondary education is constituted by six years), four years of higher education and two years of graduate studies (Masters Degree), the later of which is optional. Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is provided in TVET institutions as well as in high school (upper secondary) education and higher education.

The TVET sub-sector in the Japanese school system is made up of the following institutions/ schools: (a) Colleges of Technology; (b) Specialized Training Colleges (upper secondary course and general course); and (c) Miscellaneous Schools. The three categories of TVET institutions/ schools are briefly described in Table 1. Specialized training colleges offer a variety of practical vocational and technical education programs in response to the diverse demands of a changing society. A majority of these institutions/ schools are privately controlled and the courses they provide can be classified into three categories: upper secondary, post-secondary and general courses.

Upper secondary schools provide vocational courses and other specialized courses to those students who have chosen a particular vocational area as their future career. These courses fall under various classifications including: agriculture, industry, commerce, fishery, home economics, nursing, science-mathematics, physical education, music, art and English language.

A broader classification of TVET institutions in Japan, consists of (1) Public Vocational and Training Centers; (2) Schools; and (3) Private Organizations. While TVET programs in higher education and post-secondary institutions are under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), polytechnic universities, colleges and centers are under the supervision of The Ministry of Labor, Health and Welfare (MHLW). There are some vocational training institutions under other Ministries. In addition, there are affiliated professional schools with other Ministries such as Policy Academy, College of Meteorology and Training Centre for Diplomas. These institutions provide education and are not legislated under the School Education Law but under other legislations. The affiliated professional schools are supervised by the National Institution for Academic and Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE).

Training provided by private organizations also plays an important role in Japan. The training provided by private organizations is mainly divided into three parts: (1) Training in Corporations; (2) Training/courses for occupational licenses; and (3) other skill development programs.

A key feature of the education and training system in Japan is the on-the-job-training (OJT) and off-the-job-training (OffJT) conducted within private enterprises.

The TVET system and qualifications framework in Japan is not straightforward for two reasons: (1) unlike in Germany, academic degrees offered by TVET schools in Japan are not closely tied with

¹ This overview is based on the Japan Report on Standards and Qualifications (2015) prepared by Professor Keiichi Ogawa (Kobe University) with support from the World Bank. The Report and its overview are based on information collected from the survey developed for the East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework Project managed by Australia Commonwealth Government in 2012.

licenses; and (2) unlike the United Kingdom, the Japanese government does not have a uniform qualification framework. The result is that some licenses are closely related to schooling, but most are not. Moreover, while there are some nationally legislated licenses, thousands of private licenses are provided by private organizations (Uegami, 2003; Agata, 2010).

2. National Qualifications Framework

In 2011, the Cabinet Office in Japan (CAO) set up a technical task force on practical career strategy. The task force began to discuss the development of a Japanese version of NVQ (National Vocational Framework) based on the UK's NQF by 2020 (CAO, 2015). The prototype Japanese version of NVQ (JQF), called "*Kyaria Dani Seido*," is in part inspired by the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The prototype of JNQ has seven levels, from entry to professional level. The assessment accounts for both knowledge and practical skills. The prototype has been introduced in the following three sectors: caregiving, environment/energy, and food/tourism (Iwata, 2014).

3. Quality assurance mechanisms

3.1 Accreditation (Approval) of qualifications

The National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) is responsible for accrediting qualifications. NIAD-UE conducts certified evaluation and accreditation (CEA), a mandatory evaluation system in which evaluation and accreditation organizations certified by the MEXT and NIAD-UE is one of them. The CEA accrediting organizations evaluate the progress of education and research of universities, junior colleges, colleges of technology, and professional graduate schools based on their own standards for evaluation and accreditation. Universities, junior colleges, and colleges of technology are obliged to undergo the evaluation at least once in every seven years, and professional graduate schools at least once in every five years.

In terms of TVET institutions, the CEA is only applied to colleges of technologies. Specialized training colleges, miscellaneous schools, polytechnic centers, and affiliated professional schools are not listed under the coverage. However, NIAD-UE as an accrediting agency plays the role of awarding body for these TVET institutions. NIAD-UE examines candidates for graduation after TVET institutions apply for approval to offer certifications.

In addition to NIAD-UE, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology (MEXT) certifies 12 accrediting agencies.

There is no systematic legislation governing occupational licenses; every national and official license is governed by its own rules and regulations. It is said that national licenses and official licenses such as trade skill tests number more than a hundred in total. If non-official licenses are included, the number of licenses is more than a thousand (Agata, 2010).

There are quality standards and/or criteria applied to accrediting agencies. The Minister confers certification against certain criteria concerning their standards, methods, and framework for evaluation. Information on certified organizations is made public through government newspapers. Evaluation and accreditation results are reported to targeted institutions and the Minister, and made public to society. Target institutions have an opportunity to make remarks/objections about evaluation results prior to finalization of the process.

The implementing body of the national qualifications or provider specific qualifications is divided into the following three: (1) government; (2) local governments and public organizations; and (3) legally appointed organizations.

The public register of qualifications is recognized as being in the middle, between national qualifications and private qualifications. Registered organizations can offer public qualifications.

There is no organized legal framework on official/non-official occupational licenses. Agencies such as public interest incorporated associations accredited by Ministries can provide these licenses to qualified persons. As a case of national licenses, various licenses are unsystematically under the control of whichever Ministry is related to the occupation. For instance, childcare worker's license is under the MLHW, teacher's license is under the MEXT, and lawyer's license is under the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Then, each Ministry selects accrediting agencies by themselves. Similarly, non-official licenses are provided by various organizations (Uegami, 2003).

MEXT manages and monitors the accreditation processes. In light of the purpose of the CEA, necessary actions in response to evaluation results depend upon the self-initiative of each institution. However, the Minister may take corrective action if the university is judged to be out of compliance with laws and regulations based on unsatisfactory evaluation standards. When this is the case, it is requested it to submit reports and materials as documentary evidence for determining necessary next steps. Possible outcomes include a recommendation for improvement, an order to change, and an order to close a department or an entire institution.

It is stated in the School Education Law that every university, junior college, and college of technology is obliged to conduct self-assessment and publish its results. Each institution conducts self-assessment at the institutional level and, where needed, at the academic unit level.

Assessment

In terms of colleges of technology, specialized training colleges, and miscellaneous schools, individual providers undertake assessment for recognition of qualifications. The assessment for Polytechnic centers and affiliated professional schools is undertaken by NIAD-UE.

The awarding bodies accredited by Ministries undertake the assessment for recognition of qualifications for official occupational licenses. Non-official licenses are assessed by individual providers.

In terms of academic certificates, the CEA system functions as an external verification process. Additionally, another type of external body checking assessment has been introduced in some disciplines/areas. Accreditation of engineering programs (engineering, science, and agriculture) is one example. The Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE) conducts examinations to determine whether engineering education programs offered by higher education institutions fulfill the level expected by society, based on uniform standards established in cooperation with academic and industrial communities, and confers the status of accreditation on successful programs (JABEE, 2015).

There is no such external verification process on occupational licenses.

Educational institutions (colleges of technology, specialized training colleges) approved by the Minister of MEXT are authorized to award academic degrees. The right to award approved academic degrees in the approved fields rests with each institution.

NIAD-UE awards academic degrees and diplomas for affiliated professional schools and polytechnic universities, colleges and centers. In terms of occupational licenses, individual providers offer their qualifications.

Relationship to standards

The Vocational Ability Development Measures (VADM) is a system to assess the occupational skills and ability standards developed by MLHW. This system aims at creating a clear vision of abilities and competencies by industry and occupation. By doing so, it is expected to be a guideline for capacity development in firms and to provide a scale for the skills acquired nationally (MLHW, 2015).

The Vocational Ability Development Measures are composed of the following five programs:

- National Trade Skill Testing;
- In-house certification testing;
- Creation of vocation capability evaluation standards (VCES);
- YES-program (Support for young employee's fundamental skill development); and
- Skill Examination system (by MEXT)

The Vocational Ability Development Measures is a national standard, and this strategy covers polytechnic institutions under MLHW but not for other education levels and other TVET institutions.

There are Vocational Capability Evaluation Standards (VCES) called "*Syokugyo Nouryoku Hyoka Kijun*". The VCES, which has been developed by the MHLW and the Japan Vocational Ability Development Association (JVADA), organizes knowledge and skills which are needed in the labor market, and sets up the framework for categorizing examples of tasks and duties into four levels from entry level to manager level, by sector, occupation, and duty. The occupational standards contain competencies needed for tasks by industry, occupation and duty.

The Vocational capability evaluation standards (VCES) have been developed by the MHLW and the Japan Vocational Ability Development Association (JVADA).

3.2 Registration (Approval) of education and training providers/awarding bodies

The registration of miscellaneous schools is under local governments. Public miscellaneous schools are under the prefectural board of education and private ones are under the prefectural governor.

The registration of TVET providers is under either the jurisdiction of MEXT or NIAD-UE. School institutions such as colleges of technology, specialized training colleges are under MEXT, while polytechnic centers and affiliated professional schools link with NIAD-UE. The process of registering a TVET provider is as follows:

- An application for the establishment of an institution such as a college of technology is submitted to the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
- In response to a request from the Minister, MEXT's Council for University Chartering and School Corporation examines the application in light of relevant standards such as the Standards for the Establishment of Universities.



- Examination results are reported to the Minister, and the Minister makes a final decision regarding approval.

The Council for University Chartering and School Corporation subcommittees undertake the investigations.

In terms of polytechnic centers, the NIAD-UE investigates provider's program is equivalent to the standards of university's bachelor, master's or doctoral programs based on University Establishment Standards.

In order to examine aspects of teaching and learning, the Standards for the Establishment of Universities are mainly employed. The Standards comprise: general provisions, Educational and research structure, Academic staff organization, Eligibility criteria for academic staff, Student capacity, Academic programs, Graduation/completion requirements, Facilities and equipment, Administrative organization, and Miscellaneous provisions (NIAD-UE 2014).

The Council for University Chartering and School Corporation monitors through written reports, interviews, or site-visits whether the university conducts education and research as planned until the year in which it produces its first graduates.

3.3 Educator requirements

The minimum requirement to become an instructor in the public ordinary vocational training is to obtain Vocational Training Instructor's License for a particular type of course/ subject. Acquisition of this license is not necessary to become an instructor in public advanced vocational training, although they need as much or more knowledge and skills than the instructors in ordinary training in general.

As is the case in all lower-secondary schools, teachers, who teach vocational subjects in these schools, are required to obtain a Regular Certificate of lower secondary schools for these particular subjects. Likewise, teachers, who teach vocational subjects mainly in upper secondary schools with SC, are required to obtain Regular Certificate of upper secondary schools for these particular subjects. In Japan, people are commonly qualified as teachers by completing the teacher-training curriculum at colleges and universities, and receive teaching certificates from the prefectural board of education.

The minimum requirements to be a faculty member of a higher education institution are specified by the standards for establishment of each type of institution.

Miscellaneous schools can set the requirements of their teachers in their own ways. Article 8 of the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 31 of 1956 only states that teachers in miscellaneous schools are to have specialized knowledge and skills in the subjects they teach, and always endeavor to improve these knowledge and skills.

Minimum requirements for teachers in each course of specialized training colleges are set by the standards for establishment of these colleges specified in Articles 18 to 20 of the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 2 of 1976. In addition, there are private entities, including the Association for Technical and Career Education, which issues teacher certificates to ensure the quality of teachers in specialized training colleges (Association for Technical and Career Education, 2015).

3.4 Transnational/cross border education

In Japan, trans-national/cross border education is provided in the form of aid for developing countries. In addition, there are private institutions that implement the projects for the TVET sub-sector development in developing countries (Yamada, 2008). In 2004, MEXT started to recognize the foreign university's campus in Japan as a Foreign University Japan Campus if they meet certain quality standards for Japanese universities. In some areas, Japan has made agreements on mutual recognition of qualifications with foreign countries. Universities are allowed to make credit transfer agreements with foreign universities.

3.5 Quality indicators/data

Higher education, TVET and schools collect a suite of quality data indicators, with employers satisfaction and recognition of prior learning and credit transfer not collected across the sectors.

4. Barriers and obstacles

Issues include:

- Weak legislation for TVET in Japan.
- The education and training system in Japan is not well structured.
- Recruiting affected by the strong OJT and OffJT mechanism undermines the value of qualifications.

5. Additional information

Personnel involved in the development of this overview.

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