

Bright future for vocational education

New guidelines call for bolstering role of training schools, formation of top-notch professionals

By XU WEI
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China's latest push to promote the high-quality development of vocational education will help shore up its manufacturing base and meet surging demand for the upgrading of its industries, according to officials and experts.

In a guideline released on Oct 12, the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, spelled out a set of policy measures aimed at beefing up support for vocational schools and improving the quality of skill-focused education.

The guideline sets out targets including establishing a modern vocational education system nationwide by 2025, by which time vocational schools are expected to have seen a sharp improvement in schooling conditions, attractiveness to students and quality of training offered.

By 2035, China's vocational education system is expected to be ranked the most competitive globally, with supply matching the demand from social and economic growth, it said.

The policy document came on the heels of a slew of official measures aimed at spurring the development of vocational education in recent years.

Xu Ling, vice-president of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University and a national political adviser, said the guideline was released because China desperately needs to increase its pool of professionals, especially in the manufacturing sector.

"With manufacturing now becoming the lifeblood of the national economy, it is important that we keep up a steady supply of top-notch professionals, who will be a pillar of growth for the sector," she said.

She noted that the upgrading of China's industrial structure has now become a pressing challenge with the graying of its population.

"A prerequisite of enabling the upgrading of the industrial structure is the upgrading of manufacturing technology, which would ramp up demand for top-notch professionals," she said.

To shore up the manufacturing sector, the guideline pledged to prioritize professions including advanced manufacturing, new energy, new materials, modern information technology and artificial intelligence. The development of professions facing a shortage of workers, including elderly care, nursing, preschool and household services, will be expedited.

Institutions are encouraged to create more majors that will fit market demand and reduce those where graduates face difficulties in finding jobs.

To elevate the quality of education at vocational schools, the document called for bolstering training of professional skills and of academics, saying that eligible vocational schools will be allowed to set up community colleges.

China will prioritize support for a



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host of high-caliber institutions and professions, and take steps to promote the development of undergraduate education.

An official with the Ministry of Education said in a statement after the release that the latest policy measures are aimed at shoring up the status of vocational education and encouraging more workers, especially among the younger generation, to become skilled professionals.

The official said that a major highlight of the document is that it seeks to coordinate vocational education and general education, and promote the integrated development of different education types.

To promote the popularity of vocational education, the government will encourage schools to offer rudimentary knowledge of vocational education to primary and secondary school students, the official said, adding that the authorities will enable the mutual recognition of academic credits between vocational schools, high schools and application oriented colleges.

China has already developed the world's largest vocational education system, with 11,500 institutions and over 28 million students by the end of 2019, according to the Ministry of Education. Vocational schools offering courses in 1,200 professions train about 10 million professionals each year.

Li Qi, a professor of labor economics at the Beijing Vocational College of Labor and Social Security, said a fundamental way of boosting the attractiveness and adaptability of vocational education lies in greater collaboration with employers during the training process.

"Authorities must explore more pathways that enable greater participation from businesses in the vocational education process to enable better alignment with the industrial chain," he said.

Li also underlined the supply of more high-quality professionals as a key factor in upgrading industry, which is even more important as China grapples with mounting challenges in the form of technological blockades.

"We need our academicians and scholars from top universities to make breakthroughs in original research. We also need craftsmen who can turn their ideas into reality, which is precisely the mission of vocational education," he said.

Another crucial step is to develop a more tiered vocational education system that offers higher levels of degrees so that students can progress through the academic ranks, Li said, adding that he expected that vocational schools could start offering postgraduate degrees in the next five years.

Xu said the reason most parents still see vocational schools as the last option for their children is partly because of the lack of social security benefits offered by the professions they teach.

"Thus it would require effort not only from the supply side, the education system, but also from the demand side, which is workplaces, to initiate a broad-based change," she said.

Policy Digest

Campus First Aid Program launched

Teachers and students at 150 high schools and universities in China will receive training in first aid to be able to better respond to campus emergencies and accidents, the Ministry of Education stated in a notice issued on Oct 20.

This initiative is part of a pilot program carried out by the ministry with the aim of teaching teenagers first aid. The campuses will also be equipped with first aid facilities and equipment.

Students will learn how to respond to emergencies such as unblocking airways obstructed by foreign bodies, treating cases of bleeding and dislocations, dealing with drownings and burns, as well as how to respond to fires, earthquakes and other emergencies.

The ministry said that the best practices from the first pilot batch of high schools and universities will be copied and later applied at other schools around the country.



New regional centers to boost treatment options

China will further the construction of regional health centers in 12 provinces in central and western regions, as well as for the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, in an effort to promote the balanced distribution of quality medical resources across the country, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission said.

"The expansion and balanced distribution of medical resources is an important part of building a high-quality, efficient health service system, as well as a major move toward easing the difficulty the public faces in getting medical treatment," Ou Xiaoli, director of the NDRC's social development department, said at a news conference on Oct 20.

According to Ou, with the construction of regional health centers, by the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), people should be able to receive treatment for emergencies and severe conditions, as well as difficult and complicated diseases, within their province of residence.

China will also push forward the establishment of several national medical centers in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai by pooling the efforts of actors including colleges and universities, scientific research institutions, enterprises and local governments, he said.

Pilot project to benefit old revolutionary base

China will beef up efforts to promote the development of part of the border area between Hunan and Jiangxi provinces by setting up a demonstration zone for regional cooperation, the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, said on Oct 20.

With a total area of 50,500 square kilometers, the zone sits at the heart of an old revolutionary base and covers 24 counties, cities and districts in the two central provinces.

The NDRC said that an overall plan for the demonstration zone's construction was issued recently. According to the plan, the zone will significantly enhance its comprehensive strength by 2025 and cement remarkable achievements in regional cooperation by 2035.

The demonstration zone's sound infrastructure, coordinated industrial development, good environment and equal provision of essential public services will serve as an example for revitalizing and developing other former revolutionary bases around the country.

China encouraged to export its technical skill training expertise

By XU WEI

China will give more government scholarships in vocational education to international students as part of broader efforts to bolster international exchange in the sector, according to a recent guideline.

Jointly released by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, the guideline states that China will endeavor to build its own brand of vocational education and bolster international cooperation in the sector.

The government will also encourage vocational schools to step up cooperation on academic

research, setting standards, and personnel exchanges with high-caliber institutions abroad.

Li Qi, a professor of labor economics at the Beijing Vocational College of Labor and Social Security, said the latest policy document is an indication of China's readiness to help more developing nations improve the quality of their workforce.

"It is an embodiment of stronger confidence in the quality of our vocational education. It will also help bolster China's power of discourse and contribute more of its insight to the sector," he said.

China has scaled up vocational training for youths in developing nations in recent years.

Vocational schools from Tianjin

have set up Luban Workshops, which offer technical skills training to college students, up to now in 18 countries.

Ten of those are in Africa, where 11 workshops have been set up to help the continent develop its technical capacity. The program, which is named after Lu Ban (c. 507 — 444 BC), a renowned structural engineer, inventor and carpenter now revered as the patron of builders and contractors, was launched as part of the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

To enable more vocational schools to go global, the guideline pledged to explore a model that gives equal emphasis to Mandarin and professional skills, and to

encourage schools to partner with Chinese businesses that have established themselves in the international market.

It also highlighted the importance of improving the proportion of government scholarships available to vocational school students aspiring to study overseas.

Wang Yangnan, dean of the Central Institute for Vocation and Technical Education, said that it is important for Chinese vocational schools to offer larger scale training for professionals and professions needed in other countries, to help international cooperation on productivity.

"We also need to increase the international influence of Chinese vocational brands and help with

interpersonal exchanges between nations," he said.

Li said the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to widespread international travel restrictions, remains the largest obstacle to the furthering of international education exchanges in the sector.

"Unlike general education, vocational education requires more training at workplaces and in-person participation, which means online courses are far from sufficient," he said.

He added that schools are exploring models that combine online and offline training to ensure they maintain the quality of training before the return to normalcy in international exchanges.