

# Approaches to dual VET in tertiary education in South Korea

## EVA HANAU

Research Associate in the "International Advisory Services, Cooperation with Partner Institutions" Division at BIBB

## SEUNG-HWAN JEON

Dr., Research Fellow at the Center "Planning and Performance Management", Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET)

## HAN-BYUL LEE

Researcher at the Center "Performance Management of Work-Learning Dual System", KRIVET\*

**In South Korea, state reforms aim to strengthen the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET). Dual elements have been introduced in secondary and tertiary education and initial steps have been taken to improve the permeability between educational sectors and to strengthen the practical orientation of higher education. On the basis of two programmes, the article illustrates the concrete implementation as well as structural framework conditions of these policies and points out perspectives and challenges.**

### Strengthening the practical relevance of VET

In South Korea, the preference for higher education is traditionally strong, while VET is perceived as a second choice or even a dead end by the population. However, in view of the high level of youth unemployment, government efforts aim to strengthen the quality of VET and thus make VET attractive for young people as well as for employers. In particular, increased cooperation between enterprises and educational institutions should improve the performance of the VET sector.

VET in South Korea covers both secondary and tertiary education and has so far mainly been provided at school or in training centres. In September 2013, the government

approved the introduction of an *apprenticeship system* as a new sub-area of VET, taking the German and Swiss system of VET as a role model (cf. PARK/JEON/LEE 2018). The approach focuses on the joint participation of enterprises and educational institutions in order to better meet the skills needs of employers through work-based learning. For this purpose, school-based education is supplemented by practical training phases in companies or training centres. The conclusion of a contract between companies and apprentices and a compulsory insurance cover provide legal security for all parties involved. Practical training (*on-the-job-training = OJT*) should account for 50 to 80 per cent of the total duration. Accordingly, the proportion of school-based education (*off-the-job training = Off-JT*) is between 20 and 50 per cent.

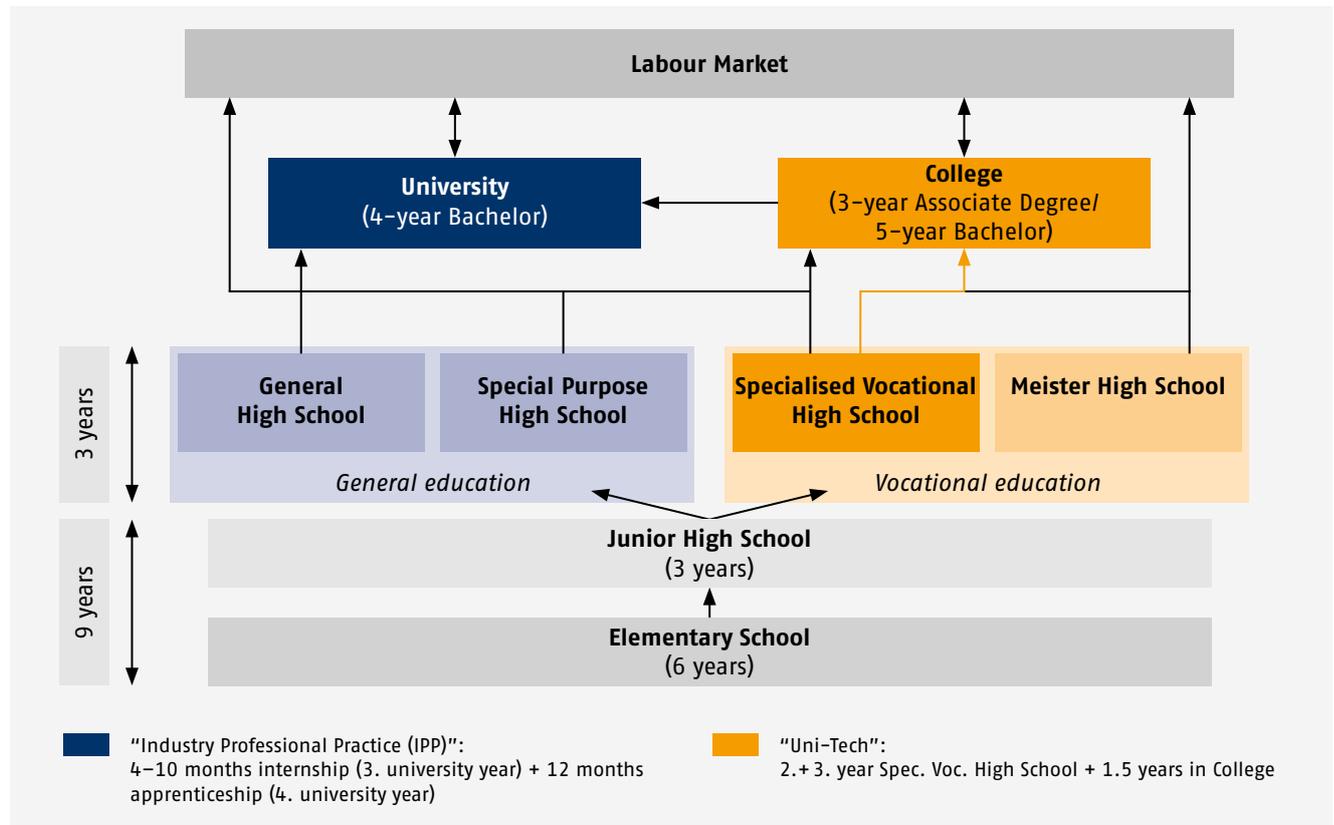
### Current approaches in tertiary education

Following the reforms, further steps have been taken to strengthen the link between VET and higher education in order to improve the permeability between VET programmes at secondary and tertiary level. First of all, linking apprenticeship with academic programmes aims to enhance the attractiveness of VET. Furthermore, offering apprenticeship programmes for university and college students should ensure a practical and demand-oriented qualification in higher education to avoid a mismatch between the academic curricula and the skills needs of companies. In the following, the implementation of two programmes is explained by way of example.

\* The authors would like to thank Dr. DONG-IM LEE, Senior Research Fellow at the Center for National Qualifications at KRIVET, for her valuable input.

Figure

Mapping of apprenticeship programmes in secondary and tertiary education



### The programme “UNI-TECH”

The programme is aimed at students of specialized vocational high schools and takes place predominantly in cooperation with companies in the machinery, electronics and construction industry. The programme begins in the second year of a total of three years of high school education. The allocation of trainees to companies is carried out by the schools.

Following secondary school, the programme further continues for one and a half years as part of a three-year college education. Thus, the students have a guarantee of transition to a college if they are accepted into the programme and perform accordingly. At both levels of education, VET is provided as a combination of (higher) education and practical in-company training. Some of the credit points to be earned at college are acquired during the practical training phase in the company and lead to the acquisition of an Associate Degree (ISCED 5 level) in addition to a certificate about the completion of the apprenticeship programme. The details are subject to specifications of the participating colleges. From the start of the programme in 2015 until April 2018, a total of 1,557 trainees and 174 companies participated in the Uni-Tech programme. This corresponds to 2.3 per cent of all trainees and 1.7 per cent of all companies in the *apprenticeship system*.

### The programme “INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE” (IPP)

The IPP programme is aimed at university students in the third and fourth year of their studies. They can apply to their university for participation in the programme. In the third year, they are initially given the opportunity to gain relevant practical experience in their field of study through four to ten-months company internships. The fourth year of university is organised as an apprenticeship and students dedicate between 50 to 80 per cent of their time to the practical training in companies. The programme is interdisciplinary – typical sectors are, for instance, IT, business administration, administration and construction. Students complete their studies with a Bachelor Degree (ISCED 6 level) and a certificate about the completion of the apprenticeship programme. Since the beginning of the programme in 2015, a total of 40 universities, 595 companies and 1,472 students have taken part in the IPP programme up to April 2018. This corresponds to 2.2 per cent of all trainees and 5.9 per cent of all companies in the *apprenticeship system*.

## Structural framework conditions

The legal basis for the *apprenticeship system* is Article 27 of the Employment Insurance Act and Article 20 of the Occupational Skills Development Act. Recently, a Legislative Bill on Support for Apprenticeship in Industrial Sites was ratified in the National Assembly on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. As apprenticeship programmes in tertiary education are implemented in close cooperation with higher education institutions and lead to the award of degrees, they are also subject to the Higher Education Act. The details of the organisation and implementation are determined by the higher education institutions and companies involved. The Human Resources Development Service of Korea (HRD Korea), an institution of the Ministry of Employment and Labour, oversees the design of training programmes as well as the quality assurance in the learning venues.

HRD Korea also issues the completion certificates for graduates and manages the financial support for apprenticeship programmes. The annual budget for the training in companies is provided by a fund for occupational skills development of the Korean Employment Insurance Fund, into which employers pay between 0.25 and 0.85 per cent of the gross wage depending on the number of full-time employees in the company. According to a cost-benefit analysis of apprenticeship programmes carried out by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) in 2015, the average amount of grants per company is 18.000 USD per trainee and year (cf. JEON et al. 2015). This includes the costs for the design and implementation of the programmes, including personnel costs, the training of in-company training personnel, as well as training allowance and accommodation for trainees. Compared to short-term vocational training measures, the costs of apprenticeship programmes are significantly higher: For example, the costs for the five-month programme “National key and strategic industry occupation training” average between 3.500 and 4.000 USD per person (cf. KANG 2016).

## First experiences and further perspectives

The information provided show that the government has taken important steps in recent years to further increase the relevance and attractiveness of VET for young people and companies, while also taking into account the specifics of the South Korean situation. It remains to be seen how these qualifications will be perceived in the long term and whether they can be established as part of the Kore-

an qualification system on a lasting basis. This depends above all on the concrete employment opportunities and labour market outcomes for graduates of apprenticeship programmes in the medium and long term.

First experiences in the programmes also show that there is still a need for adjustments in the design of individual programmes. While the IPP programme is experiencing growing demand, the close integration of apprenticeship programmes at secondary and tertiary level in the Uni-Tech programme has been faced with challenges: In particular, difficulties in aligning the respective curricula as well as the impossibility for trainees to choose the respective college or to change their specialisation in case their preferences change have resulted in an increased drop-out rate. Therefore, the programme will gradually be replaced by an alternative, the “P-Tech” (Pathways in Technical Education) programme, which has been piloted since 2017 in cooperation with selected colleges. In contrast to the Uni-Tech programme, the one and a half-year programme is aimed at secondary school graduates of apprenticeship programmes. The aim is to create more flexibility for trainees, while ensuring greater permeability between the secondary and tertiary level of education.

There is also need for further action: The newly enacted Legislative Bill on Support for Apprenticeship in Industrial Sites is an important milestone for the legal anchoring of apprenticeship programmes. However, more effort is needed to achieve national recognition of the qualifications acquired in such programmes. So far, graduates have only received a completion certificate from HRD Korea. Furthermore, the implementation of a coherent national qualification framework, which could further improve the comparability of vocational and academic qualifications, is pending. These measures could further strengthen confidence in the VET system and ensure the recognition of vocationally oriented education and training formats and degrees in higher education in the labour market. ◀

---

### Literature

- JEON, S.-H. et al.: Economic & Social Outcome Analysis of Korean Apprenticeship. KRIVET. Sejong 2015
- KANG, S.-W.: Performance Evaluation of Apprenticeship. National Assembly Budget Office. Seoul 2016
- PARK, J.-S.; JEON, S.-H.; LEE, H.-B.: Apprenticeship in Korea 2018. KRIVET. Sejong 2018