

December 2019

The **For the Future: International Conference on VET Development** was supervised by the Ministry of Education and the Development Research Centre (DRC) of the State Council, hosted by the China Development Research Foundation (CDRF) and the Chinese Society of Technical and Vocational Education (CSTVE), and co-organised by JP Morgan and supported by BMW Group Region China.

The aim was to share details of China's development and reform of its VET sector, as well as exploring future directions and promoting international cooperation.

Key themes explored by various speakers included the following:

- VET is a strategic choice for China to gain momentum for the future.
- The changing world of work is something VET needs to prepare Chinese workers for.
- China is focussed on both (a) diversifying its talent base (ie not everyone headed towards an academic higher education pathway) and (b) offering all children a chance to fulfil their aspirations.
- China's current five year reforms for VET are focussed on lifting the quality of VET, greater involvement of stakeholders in the VET system particularly business, and governments stepping back from running their VET institutions and VET system to more of a co-ordinating role, with others being more involved in the running of the system.
- China is keen to achieve the following:
  - Improve the design of their VET institutions – encourage more diversity
  - Offer a more comprehensive set of VET programs from secondary school through to Masters' level
  - Improve the outcomes from VET to improve employment outcomes
  - Create a more dynamic system with a strong role for business in the design and delivery of VET programs
  - Open up the system including through more overseas exchanges.
- China is looking for more global integration of VET systems and the related flow of skilled labour and talent.
- Officials are looking for 'pragmatic' cooperation on VET for the following sectors:
  - Digital economy
  - Robotic transportation
  - Modern logistics
  - Culture
  - Tourism
  - Healthcare
- China has the goal of educating 1 million more people through VET each year to help increase their skilled output.
- The government sees Artificial Intelligence as a key to improving both social and economic outcomes and they have identified 13 new job roles which will crucially rely on AI (these were not listed by the interpreter).
- The government is also keenly aware of the role VET can play in lifting people out of poverty and to that extent some provincial governments are waiving all fees on VET courses. The Central government (and through them the provincial governments) are focussed on VET offering a way out of poverty for children in rural areas, children of single parents, and the 'left behind' children (whose parents move to cities to work). There are 15 million children aged 16-18 years who fit into these three groups.

- China has pilot projects underway (backed by a 45million RMB investment) in rural areas focussed on these priority groups involving companies including: Apple, BHP Billiton, JP Morgan, Microsoft and others.
- China's pressing problem of its rapidly ageing population and the fact that this is happening while average GDP is still lower than for Western countries and others eg Japan.

In terms of the overseas speakers:

- The Canadian Ambassador noted that:
  - Canada needs to increase the pace and scale of its education reforms because of the changing world of work and VET is at the heart of these reforms
  - The world is going through the largest change it has in the past 500 years as a combined result of the re-rise of China and Asia (something he welcomed), the impact of Industry 4.0, and the ageing population in many parts of the world.
  - Canada is looking closely at Singapore's Skills Future work.
  - Canada needs to modularise education and focus on skills. It needs to offer more part-time learning and involve business more in its VET system (he cited the investment AT&T has made in reskilling their workforce as a result of automation through working with Georgia Tech and Udacity).
  - Canada wants more students doing apprenticeships and more apprentices spending time working in China as part of their apprenticeships.
- The **Netherlands Ambassador** praised China and also talked about the changing world of work and the need for changes to their VET systems as a consequence. He said his country was also looking for apprenticeships and internships for Dutch students in China. They are looking for a pragmatic partnership with China and welcomed more Chinese students wanting to study in the Netherlands.
- The **Singaporean Ambassador**:
  - praised China's VET reform work to date
  - agreed with previous speakers on the global challenges facing governments and businesses and the key role VET will need to play
  - spoke about lifting the status of VET and the need to expand the curriculum to offer more experiential learning, mastery and skills-oriented offerings
  - discussed internships and other forms of work-integrated learning as key to enhancing the VET system
  - noted that in 2015 only 35% of Singaporeans upgraded their skills each year. Since the introduction of Skills for the Future that figure is now 50%
  - the key is to shift the tertiary education system and people's thinking from an academically focussed education which is 'front loaded', to lifelong learning and a skills focus.
- The **Nepalese Ambassador** and the **Secretary-General of Education, Malaysia** (both countries which are recipients of China's Belt and Road funding) also sang China's praises and spoke about how they were collaborating with Chinese companies to have their students training with them.
- The **CEO of JP Morgan, China** said they had invested US \$325 million over the last 5 years to help upskilling around the world as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility. In the next 5 years they will invest a further US \$350 million. The investment will not just be on technical skills development but also personal development/psychology. They have a partnership with the International Labour Organisation to implement apprenticeships in China (with the support and involvement of the Chinese government).
- The **Science Counsellor from the German Embassy** in Beijing discussed 50 years of VET reform in Germany and how they have amended their VET system to keep it relevant (and thus how well positioned they are to help China with their VET system). He also pointed out that Germany was the first to work out what Industry 4.0 was, to name it and focus on how to train for it.

- The **UK Head of Education and Skills in the Department for International Trade in the British Embassy** in Beijing gave her whole presentation in Chinese. She focussed on the strengths of the UK VET system is, how it collaborates with China now and how it is keen to do more in the future.
- Other countries with official representation included **Pakistan, India, the Philippines, and Cambodia**. And companies who had representatives who spoke (in addition to JP Morgan) were: **Apple, BMW, Daimler, IBM, Lenovo and Microsoft**.

I was pleased to address the conference on VET reform in Australia. Please contact me by email ([admin@clairefield.com.au](mailto:admin@clairefield.com.au)) if you would like a copy of my presentation.