# Japan's Public Youth Training Programs, Enterprise-sponsored Training and the Society of Control

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## Introduction: Vocational training for Today's Youth

In April 2010, the Diet of Japan enacted the 'Law to Promote the Support of Foster Children and Youth' (*kodomo wakamono ikusei shien suishin hō*), which states that 'children and youth should grow up healthy, be well aware of their position in the society, and establish independent individualities so that they can jointly overcome the challenges of the next generation' (Cabinet, 2010a, p. 2). To promote these aims, the law invokes a societal ideal: 'all members of all social institutions – such as families, schools, workplaces, local communities – play their roles supporting children and youth in a *cooperative* and *integrated* fashion' (ibid., p. 3; emphasis T.I.). This statement implies that the institutions that make up society were divided along jurisdictional lines, and are now to be comprehensively integrated. The newly enacted law underlies the 'Guidelines for Children and Youth' (*kodomo wakamono bijyon*), which, made available in July 2010, greatly emphasizes cooperative and integrated support that focuses on the employability of the future workforce (Cabinet, 2010b).

According to Michel Foucault, 'in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination' (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). Disciplines form '*enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself' (ibid. p. 141; emphasis M.F.), which Foucault describes as 'the protected place of disciplinary monotony' (ibid.). Individuals used to transfer from one enclosed place to another, each of which was governed by its own unique set of disciplines: individuals generally passed from family to school, from school to military barracks, from military barracks to factory, occasionally to hospital, or even to prison. In Gilles Deleuze's analysis, the epoch of 'disciplinary societies'

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M. Pilz (Ed.), *The Future of Vocational Education and Training in a Changing World*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-18757-0_8,

is now over, as we've entered 'societies of control' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4), in which individuals – now 'dividuals' (ibid., p. 5) – have no definite enclosed space, consequently make no discrete transitions from one enclosed space to another: there is only a 'continuous network' (ibid., p. 6).[1] The unenclosed space – society – is now governed on the basis of data by free-floating control rather than by disciplines. Deleuze specifically points out a new phenomenon that illustrates the disappearance of the dividing line between school and workplace: 'many young people strangely boast of being 'motivated', they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It's up to them to discover what they're being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the *telos* of the disciplines' (ibid.).

In the epoch of disciplinary societies, in which the allocation of roles between school and workplace was clearly divided, Japan functioned in an exemplary way. Smooth transition from school to workplace used to be an internationally acclaimed characteristic of Japan's educational system (Dore and Sako, 1998, p. 168). In Japan, where school is devoted solely to general education, and vocational training starts only at the workplace, the ability of the young to find permanent and mostly regular employment has been attributed to the close relations between schools and enterprises rather than an apprenticeship as a bridging period (Kariya, 1999, p. 282).[2] Today, however, Japan is transforming into a society of control.

Since the beginning of the 1990's, the transition from school to workplace has become much harder, and the number of involuntary non-regular employees has increased dramatically, especially among young people, a trend which is exacerbated by the desire of the enterprises to 'save labor expenses' (JILPT, 2009, p. 79). As a consequence, non-regular employment is considered normal today. There is a diversity of non-regular employees, such as part-time workers, dispatched workers and contract workers. Young temporary employees or part-timers are called 'free *arbeiter*', or 'freeter' for short.[3] Increasingly, young people complain about

[1] This change causes a series of new phenomena: 'just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training tends to replace the school' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5).

[2] Japan has been termed 'youth friendly' (OECD, 2000, p. 46) due to this smooth transition. Conventionally, this smooth transition has been ascribed to the exceptionally close relations between schools and enterprises. Recent research has challenged this view, however, pointing out that such close relations are not unique to Japan and that they only partially account for the phenomenon they appear to explain (Kosugi, 2010a, pp. 2 et seq.).

[3] There has always been a large number of part-time working students and housewives. But it is a novel phenomenon for many young people to enter part-time employment as their main occupation after leaving school. Such 'freeters', according to the official definition, are 15–34 year olds that neither attend school nor help with housework, but either work as employees called arbeit (part-timer) or seek a job as arbeit. Women must also be unmarried to fit the definition.

'lack of opportunities for regular employment' (ibid.), and those who are employed as non-regular workers miss the opportunity to accumulate job skills through in-house training that enterprises generally offer to their regular employees. As their resilience declines with increasing age, access to regular employment becomes ever more remote.

Enterprises attempt to reduce personnel costs not only by increasing the share of non-regular employees, but also by asking regular employees to assume responsibility for their training themselves. Among Japanese enterprises, there is a marked decline in the conventional practice of recruiting large numbers of new graduates as regular employees and providing them with intensive in-house training (ibid., p. 147). As a consequence of this decline, regular employees as well as non-regular employees are increasingly expected to undergo training without relying on enterprises to provide it.

Under these circumstances, public vocational training is coming to play an ever more important role, and the demand for public vocational training is rising rapidly. In 2008, there were only 130,000 trainees, while their number rose to 450,000 in 2009. The government anticipated in 2009 that the number of trainees would reach a million in the coming three years (Asahi Newspaper, 2009). Yet the rise of public vocational training does not necessarily alleviate the employment crisis: having undergone training, an increasing number of people still remain without a job, as the training provided does not sufficiently reflect the demand of the enterprises.

## Framework of Public Vocational Training

From the beginning of the modern period until the 1950's, the Japanese government played the dominant role in the provision of vocational training, for example in introducing foreign educational systems. In the 1960's, government began to regard enterprise-level human resources development as central; scaling back its involvement, it came to limit its role to the facilitation and supplementation of such programs. As a consequence, human resource development came to depend on enterprise-sponsored training as part of a culture that favored lifetime employment and the seniority system. The *Human Resources Development Promotion Act*

In addition to such young non-regular workers, there is an increasing number of jobless young people who are not looking for a job (in many cases after a long, unsuccessful job search). They are called NEET and are distinguished from the unemployed, who are seeking a job. NEET are aged between 15 and 34, are not in the work force, and are neither enrolled in schools nor engaged in housework. More about freeters and NEETs: see Ito 2007, especially chapter III.3.

(*shokugyō nōryoku kaihatsu sokushin hō*; formerly *shokugyō kunren hō*) of 1985 reflects this attitude toward vocational training. The Act promotes enterprise-oriented vocational training by authorizing on-the-job training and introducing flexible criteria for training to reflect the varying needs of individual enterprises.[4]

On the basis of this piece of legislation, the *Basic Plan for Human Resources Development* (*shokugyō nōryoku kaihatsu kihon keikaku*) is drawn up every five years. The sixth iteration of the 'Basic Plan', which covers the period between 1996 and 2000, marked a turning point away from the traditional system as it highlights increasing labor mobility and introduced the principle of personal responsibility for job skills development. Within this framework, the 'Training and Education Benefits System' (*kyōiku kunren kyūfu seido*) was introduced in 1998 and established the principle that workers can receive stipends for training on their own initiative. The seventh iteration of the 'Basic Plan' for the period between 2001 and 2005 acknowledged that innovation in technology and economic globalization cause increasing mismatches between prospective employees' skills and the labor market's demands, and consequently emphasizes the importance of access to relevant information on the labor market as well as the importance of access to vocational training for workers' career development (JILPT, 2009, p. 136). The eighth iteration of the plan for the period between 2006 and 2010 stresses the importance of public programs[5] as the foundation of job skills development so that workers can take personal responsibility for their vocational development (ibid., p. 149).

Today, government operates under a quite expansive definition of the term 'public vocational training' which no longer refers merely to the provision of vocational training at public human resources development facilities. Public vocational training now also includes the payment of subsidies to defray educational expenses, based on three policies:

1. Providing vocational training at public human resources development facilities (the narrow definition of public vocational training).
2. Encouraging employers and employer associations in the private sector to offer vocational training by awarding subsidies, disseminating information, and providing consulting services.

[4] In addition to the conventional type of training programs, in which 190 vocational categories are recognized, a new type of training program has been introduced that doesn't prescribe any categories (Tanaka, 1996).

[5] The document mentions the development of a 'Japanese Dual System' (nihon-ban dyuarushisutemu) for freeters and 'Independence Camps for Youth' (wakamono jiritsu juku) for NEET (MHLW, 2006).

3. Motivating workers to acquire skills voluntarily by granting subsidies and providing informational and consulting services (JILPT, 2006, p. 112).

Because of this expansive definition, and because responsibility for vocational training had lain with the enterprises for decades,[6] public vocational training schemes, especially those for young people, remain insufficiently developed.

Detailed policy guidelines relating to the 'Basic Plan' are developed by an adjunct agency of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), the Employment and Human Resources Development Organization (EHDO; *koyō nōryoku kaihatsu kikō*). EHDO also supervises the implementation of these guidelines and aims to strengthen the public vocational training system as one of its main commitments. The public vocational training of graduates from school, unemployed workers and employed workers is then conducted at public human resources development facilities,[7] of which there are 73 national institutions under the supervision of EHDO and 178 prefectural institutions (Terada, 2009, p. 169).[8]

[6] 'There was virtually no organization to help young people that belonged to neither school nor workplace with opportunities for education, training, counseling, or job hunting' (Miyamoto, 2005, p. 77).
Public expenditure on vocational training programs as percentage of GDP was 0.14% in Japan in 2008, while in Germany it was 0.29% (OECD, 2010a, pp. 299 et seqq.). According to a recent OECD report, Japan's public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure was the lowest-but-one of the 33 OECD countries: Japan spent only 9.4% in 2007, as compared to an average of 13.3%. More public expenditure on education is desirable, because, according to the OECD analysis, employment rates strongly correlate with educational attainment (OECD, 2010, p. 100).

[7] EHDO's remit includes three areas:

1. Providing vocational training at public human resources development facilities;
2. Encouraging employers and employer associations in the private sector to offer vocational training by awarding subsidies, disseminating information and providing consulting services;
3. Motivating workers to acquire skills voluntarily by granting stipends and providing informational and consulting services (JILPT, 2006, p. 112).

[8] EHDO offers vocational training to three groups:

1. The unemployed are eligible for training courses (e.g. courses for technical operation like mechanical design and process, control technology, building maintenance, services, housing service), which last three to six months. In 2009, there were 29,405 trainees at facilities supervised by EHDO and 43,424 trainees at providers under contract with EHDO, then additional 22,924 trainees due to supplementary budget. The employment rate is 78.6% at EHDO-providers (66.2% of those as permanent employment) and 68.1% at contracted providers (58.8% of those as permanent employment);

## Public Vocational Training Programs for Young People

The 'Japanese Dual System' was introduced as the cornerstone of public vocational training. In 2003, the 'Summit on Challenges and Strategies for Youth Independence' (*wakamono jiritsu chōsen senryaku kaigi*)[9] drew up the 'Independence and Challenge Plan for Young People' (*wakamono jiritsu chōsen puran*) which led MHLW and MEXT to introduce their separate versions of the Japanese Dual System in 2004: While the Japanese Dual System as promoted by MEXT is aimed at vocational high school students (especially students at technical high schools), the Japanese Dual System as promoted by MHLW is aimed at young people who do not go to regular schools any more.[10] This new system was built on the German model, in which young people study at vocational schools and concurrently undergo training as apprentices at enterprises. The dual system in Germany aims to render trainees employable in accordance with nationally prescribed standards. The dual system in Japan originally aimed to do the same and was implemented after persistent lobbying by the Japan Business Federation (*nippon keidanren*), an organization that had been championing the concept of 'employability' since at least 1999, as the 'ability to be employed within and outside of companies and ability to facilitate labor mobility' (JILPT, 2009, p. 138).

Under the slogan 'Learning while you work', EHDO recognizes three types of training providers:

1. Polytechnic universities governed by EHDO offer a 'Special Course' (*senmon-katei katsuyō-gata*), which lasts two years and includes on-the-job training at enterprises. Trainees are high-school graduates under 40 years of age.
2. Polytechnic centers governed by EHDO offer a 'Short-Term Course' (*tanki-katei katsuyō-gata*), which lasts six months (maximum twelve months) and includes on-the-job training at enterprises. Trainees are mostly freeters.

2. Employees are eligible for training courses (e.g. qualification courses for mechanical design, CAD/CAM and factory automation), which last two or three days. In 2009, there were 42,367 trainees;
3. Training courses (e.g. electrical technology, information technology and machining) for new graduates last one or two years. In 2009, there were 81 trainees. The employment rate was 89.7% (MLHW, 2010).

[9] The summit included four Cabinet ministries: the Cabinet Office, the MHLW, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

[10] For a more detailed account of the contrast between the Japanese Dual System introduced by MEXT and the one introduced by MHLW, see Ito 2010.

**Table 1** Contract Course (Source: EHDO (2010))

| Year | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Programs** | 1,620 | 1,526 | 1,649 | 1,534 | 1,891 | 2,025 |
| **Number of Trainees** | 32,905 | 24,681 | 25,538 | 24,912 | 30,426 | 34,217 |
| **Percentage of Employment** | 68.6 | 72.3 | 75.3 | 77.1 | 74.4 | 70.6 |

3. Private providers under contract with EHDO offer a 'Contract Course' (*itaku-kunren katsuyō-gata*), which lasts four months (maximum six months) and includes on-the-job training at enterprises. Trainees are mostly freeters (MHLW, 2010).

Two of those course types, namely 'Short-Term Course' and 'Contract Course', are intended for young non-regular workers, who have virtually no access to vocational training.

The 'Contract Course' was introduced in 2004. Its contents differ from one institution to another, but in general, trainees obtain knowledge and skills in a certain area (e.g. data processing) at the contract institute for the first three months of a four-month course, which is a part of their preparation for a vocational qualification. After obtaining the qualification, trainees spend the fourth and last month undergoing on-the-job training at enterprises (Nagata, 2007). The number of 'Contract Course' trainees has increased, and most participants find jobs after completing the course (see Table 1).

The 'Short-Term Course' was introduced in 2007 and follows a set pattern as well. In the first four months, trainees obtain knowledge and skills in a certain area (e.g. mechanical engineering, electrical engineering) at polytechnic centers. In parallel with this educational training, trainees choose enterprises where they would like to have on-the-job training during the course and get employed afterwards. They undergo training at their chosen enterprises for a month: in the second half of the fifth month and in the first half of the sixth month. In the second half of the sixth month, they study at polytechnic centers to attain knowledge and skills they did not manage to acquire while training at the enterprise (Matsumoto, 2010). The number of 'Short-Term Course' trainees has increased, and in comparison with the trainees of 'Contract Courses', a higher percentage found jobs after completing the course (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Short-Term Course (Source: EHDO (2010))

| Year | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Programs** | 166 | 203 | 237 |
| **Number of Trainees** | 1,560 | 2,511 | 3,088 |
| **Percentage of Employment** | 89.7 | 82.1 | 83.6 |

Ideally, enterprises and educational training providers (polytechnic centers and private providers) would design a program jointly, making sure that the contents of educational training and the contents of on-the-job training are integrated into a coherent, unified package, thus maximizing the employability of their trainees. In reality, the Japanese Dual System falls short of this ideal. Providers of educational training (polytechnic centers and private providers) generally struggle to find a sufficient number of enterprises to take on trainees. As a consequence, they have to indulge enterprises with respect to the contents of on-the-job training. Educational training providers attempt to recruit enterprises by stressing the incentive that enterprises may expect to retain a trainee as a permanent worker after the course. This expectation means that trainees are advised to choose an enterprise for their training with a view to permanent employment after the course (Nagata, 2007, p. 166). While quantitative rules – e.g. the ratio of on-the-job training to educational training – are strictly adhered to, the qualitative aspects – e.g. integration between educational training and on-the-job training – tend to be disregarded. Individual enterprises determine the contents of their on-the-job training, often tailoring them only to their own specific needs, without imparting the general knowledge and skills required outside their respective enterprise. The contents and quality of on-the-job training offered by the enterprises are considered to be of minor importance: providers leave the contents of on-the-job training up to enterprises, which are free to develop the job skills for which they happen to have the greatest need (ibid., p. 168). Thus, medium-sized and small enterprises will take on trainees as workers in the busiest season to make up for labor shortfalls.

This system, then, although often touted for its efficiency, amounts to little more than a subsidized trial period[11] camouflaged as practical training.[12] Meanwhile, the

[11] Enterprises are entitled to a monthly subsidy of ¥24,000 (about €210) for every trainee.

[12] Instructors of a polytechnic center have expressed their belief that the dual system provides enterprises with an opportunity to examine trainees' aptitude for a job, while providing trainees with an opportunity to show their determination and attitude toward the job (Matsumoto, 2010, p. 7).

Japanese Dual System has begun to resemble a job bank that lets trainees be hired at the enterprises where they have on-the-job training, with little consideration given to developing their employability.

The alleged efficiency of the dual system is coming under increased critical scrutiny, as it becomes clear that the original purpose of the Japanese Dual System is not being served very well (ibid.). Eiichi Sasaki, for instance, criticizes that the Japanese Dual System was launched without publicly set standard curricula (Sasaki, 2005, p. 10), as the skills acquired in training should not be limited to meet the particular interest of enterprises offering the training, but be broad enough to meet the general interest in having validity outside the specific enterprises. The original purpose of the dual system appears to be honored in the strict discipline with which enterprises maintain evaluation sheets of their trainees and thereby purport to document the progress made in their employability. But in actual fact, the system is geared to serve the private interests of individual enterprises and contributes next to nothing towards the publicly funded goal of raising the trainees' employability.

Four years after the introduction of the Japanese Dual System, a job card system was introduced which partly overlaps with the dual system. Launched in April 2008, the 'Japanese Job Card System' (*jobu kādo seido*) is modeled after the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) scheme in Great Britain (Cabinet, 2007, p. 13) and seeks to increase the employability especially of freeters, working mothers and single mothers.

Under this scheme, job seekers can fill out job cards with information about their education and training backgrounds, qualifications, and employment history, and receive career-counseling at public job centers, which will issue and verify the job cards. Depending on the advice of counselors, some go job hunting with their job card right away, others enter programs designed to develop their vocational abilities. People entering such programs can earn certificates of vocational abilities (so-called Vocational Ability Evaluation Sheets) and return to the career-counselor to have their certificate added to the job card and receive new advice.

MHLW offers programs to develop vocational abilities[13] in two categories: 'Entrusted Training' (*itakugata kunren*) and 'Contracted Training' (*koyōgata kunren*). 'Entrusted Training' and a part of the Japanese Dual System have been merged: the existing 'Contract Course' was integrated into the Job Card System upon its inception in 2008. In 2009, the more recent 'Short-Term Course' followed the precedent and was integrated into the Job Card System as well. 'Contracted Training', where

[13] MEXT offers 'Practical Programs for Education' (*jissengata kyōiku puroguramu*), so that people can learn to improve their vocational abilities, and get certificates upon completion of a program.

**Table 3** Job Card System (Source: Cabinet (2011))

| Year | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|
| **Number of Issued Cards** | 64,865 | 159,268 |
| **Number of Authorized Enterprises** | (A) 582<br>(B) 506 | (A) 3,979<br>(B) 1,557 |
| **Number of Enterprises Which Undertook Trainees** | (A) 237<br>(B) 164 | (A) 2,397<br>(B) 424 |
| **Number of Trainees** | (A) 505<br>(B) 957 | (A) 4,338<br>(B) 3,133 |

(A) Fixed-Term Practical Training
(B) Practical Human Resources Development System

people undergo training with a contract of employment, consists of two types: one is 'Fixed-Term Practical Training' (*yūki-jisshūgata kunren*) and lasts between three and six months, aiming to secure regular employment; the other is 'Practical Human Resources Development System' (*jissengata jinzaiyōsei shisutemu*) which lasts between six months and two years, training prospective middle management. Enterprises receive a subsidy of ¥600 (about €5) per hour for every trainee they accept. Job cards are intended to enable job seekers to analyze their vocational abilities objectively and to communicate these abilities to enterprises recruiting new employees, while also enabling enterprises to employ candidates whose abilities are confirmed to match their needs. In this way, the Job Card System is assumed to reduce mismatches between job seekers and employers. The Job Card System has turned out to have a much lower adoption rate than expected. Initial projections estimated that 500,000 individuals would acquire a job card within the first three years, and a million within the first five. The number of job card holders has increased less rapidly, however (see Table 3). By December 2010, only about 330,000 individuals held a job card, and more than 100,000 amongst them pursued training, with about 70% of them going on to employment. Big enterprises are not particularly interested in joining the scheme either. While two large enterprises, Canon and Panasonic, set an example of 'Fixed-Term Practical Training' on a trial basis, enterprises participating in the scheme today are mostly small and medium-sized.

In addition to the unimpressive adoption rate, the efficiency of the Job Card System has been questioned. The government's oversight committee of current projects (*jigyō shiwake*) found the subsidies paid to the participating enterprises too high, and proposed to abolish them altogether, as well as defunding the campaign for job cards (Asahi Newspaper, 2010a).

Despite these setbacks, the immediate future of the program appears to be secured. Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, after consultations with industry representatives, adopted the 'Basic Policy for the Employment Strategy 2011' (*koyō senryaku kihon-hōshin 2011*), a set of principles that ignore the criticism and leave the Job Card System unchanged (Asahi Newspaper, 2010b).

## Conclusion: Public Vocational Training and the Society of Control

There are indications that Japan is turning into a society of control. Obscuring the dividing line between school and workplace, various government agencies cooperated on the 'Independence and Challenge Plan for Young People'. Since the introduction of the plan in 2003, the distinction between school as the discrete location of general education and the workplace as the discrete location of vocational education and training has been fading into near oblivion. The harder the government tries to establish a 'continuous network' between school and workplace, the more visible the discontinuity between enterprises becomes, even as they are called upon to provide the training at the core of the policies that are being brought in.

The Japanese Dual System and the Job Card System were both introduced to improve young people's employability quickly and efficiently, and both sets of policies require enterprises to sponsor trainees. Despite the increasing importance of securing a sufficient number of enterprises to sponsor trainees, however, enterprises are increasingly less inclined to commit themselves to the task. Various measures, such as public funding, try to entice enterprises to sponsor trainees, yet when enterprises do sponsor trainees, they invariably pursue their own specific interests in the training they provide, showing little or no interest in raising their trainees' employability, or in imparting transferable vocational skills.

The Japanese Dual System and the Job Card System are designed to help young people, especially freeters, and raise their employability rather than make them gain job skills that are compatible only with a single enterprise. But the difficulty of finding enterprises for on-the-job training has created a situation in which enterprises are allowed to provide on-the-job training with little regulation or oversight, answering few needs except their own. Although some observers still cherish the hope that the government's measures, especially subsidies and job cards, will markedly improve the employment crisis (Hori, 2010, p. 113), these measures are already known to work much less efficiently than expected.

The reason for the poor performance of the Japanese Dual System lies to a large extent in the historical and cultural background against which Japan imported its policies from the European countries whose approaches to vocational training it hoped to emulate. The dual system in Germany, although formally launched only in 1964, extends a historical tradition of labor relations that goes back to the medieval system formed by trade associations (*Innungen* / *Zünfte*). The Germans managed to enforce a standard of vocational training that fostered employability on the basis of trade affiliations. Japan lacks such a tradition. Britain's National Vocational Qualification, the model of the Job Card System in Japan, was introduced in 1986 and sets national standards for various well-defined occupational categories.[14] Japan, by contrast, lacks any concept of well-defined occupational categories as a basis on which to define national standards for vocational training programs. Without such a standard, public vocational training will necessarily remain a losing proposition.

While government policy aims to encourage the formation of a 'continuous network' between school and workplace, the formation of a corresponding network between trainee-sponsoring enterprises makes little progress, thus undermining the emergence of a newly balanced understanding of the relationship between school and workplace. If the provision of public vocational training is any indication, Japan's transformation into a society of control will neither be smooth nor fast.

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[14] For a detailed discussion of National Vocational Qualification, see Hyland, 2008.

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