

## 16. A Plan for a New Qualifications System in the Knowledge and Information Era

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### 1. Study Background

The knowledge and information era does not involve only a progress in the informing data based on IT technologies but also refer to a new society with complex mega-trends including globalization, rapid technological changes and growth of the service industry. As technologies used at the industrial fields evolve drastically, it is difficult for qualifications to reflect on-site needs. Also with fast transformation of external circumstances which highlights the necessity of lifelong learning, learning should essentially be pursued on a constant basis and linkage between its result and qualifications. In an environment where labor movement is inevitable with the advent of the globalization trend, more weight is given to the functions of qualifications to facilitate labor movement. Against this background, this study focuses on the rising need of preparing strategies for a new qualifications system by re-identifying functions and roles of qualifications.

### 2. Results

#### A. Diagnosis of the Korean Qualifications System

As for the trend of qualifications application, the number of applicants has decreased. Recently, the number of applicants for technician qualification has particularly reduced, while the number of applicants for license qualification or high level professional qualifications has slightly increased.

One of the most serious problems of the current qualification system is its uselessness. In addition, the awareness toward qualifications is still at a low level and the qualifications are not utilized as standards for employment or promotion at corporations. Even when one obtains a qualification, the job area of the qualification, in many cases, does not coincide with the area that the worker practically engages in. Moreover, as the qualification items do not reflect on-site needs, they should be overhauled. In addition, as a result of an analysis on whether the test standards reflect on-site needs, it was found that there is a gap between the test contents of job duties and the skills required at the industrial fields. Meanwhile, it is worth a note that the method of granting qualifications in Korea is not proper to promote lifelong learning desired in the knowledge and information era.

Finally, the effects of qualifications on job transfer, job duties satisfaction level, employment and wage were examined. As a result, it was revealed that qualifications play a role of signaling employment and job transfer but does not affect the area concerning satisfaction on job duties, wage, and workers after employment.

### B. Diagnosis of Changes in External Environment

Aging of population and change in people's tastes have brought about emergence in new industries such as silver industry, environment industry and sports industry. Qualification items in these areas, however, are not diversified yet. In addition, proportions of the primary and secondary industries are falling with the growth of service industry, while that of the tertiary industry is rising. Also, the manufacturing industry is increasingly linked to the service industry with the development of information and telecommunications technologies. Therefore, National Skills Qualifications taking its root at the traditional manufacturing industry cannot guarantee on-site utility any more and thus, measures to address this problem should be prepared.

Meanwhile, job duties have changed drastically and the job structure has simplified centering around unskilled manual work, service related work, research and analysis work and culture and art work. This signifies that with decreasing demands for workers with middle level skills, the demand for relevant qualification items will decline as opposed to rising demand for high level skills.

### C. Analysis of Recent Changes in Qualification Systems of Other Nations

Nations around the world have recently witnessed a variety of changes to their qualification systems. The changes and their implications can be analyzed and summarized as follows.

First, efforts are being made to strengthen on-site utility of qualification. With the global trend of rapid technological changes, there are rising needs toward changes in qualification items and contents and methods of qualification assessments. In Germany, experts at various research organizations have made concerted efforts to launch "the early recognition system (so-called the early warning system)" in order to survey qualifications requirements responding to emergence of new jobs in the wake of technological changes. It is a kind of system to deliver qualifications requirements.

Second, countries around the world are paying a keen attention to preparing for the lifelong learning society. For example, in Australia, recognition of prior learning is advanced at the national level and flexible linkage between study and work is promoted in a similar way as the Germany Dual System for reducing unemployment rate of adolescents. Moreover, the school-based apprenticeship, a mix of vocational education and training and general education, is spreaded in the country.

Third, with the frequently growing movement of labor among countries, nations around the globe are preparing for mutual certification of qualifications. For example, Germany has come up with a system for mutual certification of qualifications among EU member countries. In a similar drive, Japan has improved its professional engineer system as part of the efforts to prepare introduction of a system for mutual certification with other nations.

Fourth, qualification systems are becoming more flexible. In Germany, the module type qualifications has been introduced and in Japan increasingly diverse entities have become in charge of management and operation of qualifications.

#### D. Establishment of Concept, Functions and Roles of Qualifications in the Knowledge and Information Era

In Korea, a qualification is being defined, under the Basic Qualification Act, as "the level of acquisition of knowledge and skills that are evaluated and recognized according to certain standards and process and the competency required for job duties performance". Based on this definition, qualifications are confined to vocational ones and granted through one-time testing service. However, changes in the concept of qualification is required in the knowledge and information era because lifelong learning has become more important and labor movement is increasing. Qualifications so far have been based on workers but in the future individual learners including workers should be the focus of qualifications. Also, a qualification system should emphasize recognition of individual competency rather than the labor market. The learning (education and training) here should have various forms and methods. In addition, granting of qualifications should be done in a more diverse way. As for functions of qualifications, while signaling, guiding and screening functions have been stressed in the past, other functions should be added including promotion of labor movement, enhancement of lifelong learning and integrating and linking of various competency evaluation mechanisms.

#### E. Vision and Strategy of New Qualification System

The strategy for the new qualification system desired in the knowledge and information era is to secure flexibility, integration and standardization of qualifications. Sub and detail plans of the strategy are as follows.

##### 1) Increased Flexibility of Qualifications

Sub Plans	Detail Plans
Strengthen lifelong career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establish role model of qualifications</li> <li>-Enhance participation by employed workers on qualification acquisition</li> <li>-A qualification system responding to changes in the population structure</li> </ul>
Increase on-site utility of qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Link with Corporate HRD</li> <li>-Continued development of professionalism by qualification acquirers</li> <li>-Support acquisition of qualifications</li> <li>-Facilitate in-house qualification systems</li> </ul>
Establish a qualification requirements delivery system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Strengthen the function of SHRDC identifying qualification requirements</li> <li>-Introduction of the qualification early warning system</li> <li>-Improve competency of organizations operating the qualification system</li> </ul>

## 2) Integration of Qualifications

Sub Plans	Detail Plans
Develop module type qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Develop module type qualifications</li> <li>-Develop module type evaluation methods</li> <li>-Improve the process and methods of obtaining qualifications</li> <li>-Develop and apply module type qualifications on a pilot basis</li> </ul>
Link academic background, career and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Prepare a NQF</li> <li>-Improve the qualification grade and standard of application eligibility</li> <li>-Prepare measures to recognize prior learning</li> </ul>
Link with education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Prepare the manual and process for development of national skills standards</li> <li>-Establish a system to certify national skills standards</li> <li>-Utilize the national skills standards</li> </ul>

## 3) Standardization of Qualifications

Sub Plans	Detail Plans
Mutual certification of qualifications among countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Improve the professional engineer qualification system</li> <li>-Improve the professional service qualification system</li> <li>-Secure transparency of qualifications</li> </ul>
Establish a RQF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establish a NQF</li> <li>-Establish a RQF</li> <li>-Carry out diverse researches on foreign qualification systems</li> </ul>
Quality management of test organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Manage organizations</li> <li>-Manage and operate the test system</li> </ul>

## 3. Conclusion

What is especially emphasized under the new paradigm is the integration of qualifications. Breaking away from the traditional testing service that had been offered only once, a system for evaluation and recognition of various types of learning, should be established and the relevant qualifications should be granted for the learning. In order to realize this new qualifications method, the following should be pursued in the future.

First, roles of the government and the private sector should be established. The

current method initiated by the government should be avoided but qualifications that are recklessly issued by private organizations should not be recognized, either. While respecting independence of the private sector, private qualifications that are introduced to the social system should be controlled in an appropriate way. As the authority of establishing new qualifications is monopolized by the Administration (strictly speaking, individual ministries), participation of relevant professionals and private organizations should be guaranteed, thus decentralizing the authority.

At the same time, there should be more clarified standards and process for establishing new qualifications and the clear division of roles among ministries at the government should be made.

Second, establishment of skill standards and a National Qualification Framework should be carefully examined.

Third, various types of qualifications should be recognized. Besides the existing national qualifications, national technical qualifications, private qualifications and officially recognized private qualifications, and new types of qualifications should be also recognized.

Fourth, the relationship between educational qualifications and vocational qualifications should be clarified. The 1:1 linkage between vocational qualifications (currently national technical qualifications) and educational qualifications was favorably addressed in recent discussions on the KQF. However, this deserves a more careful review because there exists a big gap between the time spent for acquisition of vocational qualifications and degrees and the contents of learning.

Fifth, the evaluation and recognition methods for diverse competencies should be recognized, which is deeply related with systemizing evaluation and recognition of prior learning (experience) and establishing a recognition system for various types of education that are provided through different methods and in different times and places.

Sixth, if qualifications can be viewed as closely related with evaluation and recognition of competency, it would be also important to establish a system to manage accumulated scores.