

Problems in Career Guidance for Unemployed Graduates

Summary

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Awareness of issue

This report aims to seek out the direction for labor policy while shedding light on the present job-hunting and career development support at senior high schools and universities.

New graduates' transition from school to work in Japanese society had been smooth until the early 1990s before a great change from the second half of the 1990s. This change was an increase in the number of youths who failed to decide their course upon graduation from school without advancing to higher education or finding a job. In Japan where new graduates have usually been recruited en masse, youths who fail to find work upon graduation from school may be more likely to plunge into a career development crisis. Previous studies have pointed out that youths' conditions when they graduate from school would tend to have lasting influences on their future employment.

As noted by “Off to a Good Start? Jobs for Youth” (OECD, translated by Hamaguchi and Nakajima, 2011), youths’ first experiences in labor market can greatly affect their future vocational life. It also points out that an employment crisis could be a blemish for youths who graduate from school amid such crisis.

Based on the awareness mentioned above, researchers have conducted surveys to look into job-hunting and career development support from various perspectives.

Earlier studies, which are specifically considered in later chapters, have focused on surveys of individuals (students), and quantitative surveys of senior high schools and universities that support students, particularly such surveys concerning their support for unemployed graduates, have been limited.

Discussions on job-hunting support should cover supporters as well as the realities of supported students. This is because youths’ transition from school to work in Japanese society has featured organizations’ deep involvement in the transition.

Being aware of the abovementioned issue, we conducted the following two surveys in 2010. See relevant chapters for details and objectives of the surveys. They both are urgent surveys conducted at the request of the Youth Employment Affairs Office, Employment Security Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

- (1) Urgent survey on unemployed graduates (senior high schools)
- (2) Urgent survey on unemployed graduates (4-year universities)

Issues and challenges for supporters differ by educational stage (see relevant chapters for specific issues). Nevertheless, we found common challenges regarding support by senior high schools and universities subject to the surveys, as outlined below before an analysis:

First, students receiving job-hunting support are limited. At senior high schools, only students who have clearly expressed their intention to look for jobs are supported. Students who drop out from job-hunting support cannot receive support from schools or the labor administration. At universities as well, job-hunting support has fallen short of covering students who give up on job search or who make little effort to find a job. Support for dropouts is insufficient at both senior high schools and universities.

Even those who are not clearly willing to find jobs upon graduation from school will, at some time in the future, enter society and will be in the labor market. We must take into account these potential job seekers behind specific job seekers.

Second, job-matching capabilities at organizations such as schools and universities have clearly declined. It has been pointed out that Japanese schools feature job-matching functions and their involvement in job-hunting support has contributed to holding down the youth unemployment

rate. However, a decline in job-matching capabilities is now common to both senior high schools and universities.

Growing important amid the school sector's weakening job-matching functions are: (1) an increase in the relative weight of direct job-hunting support from the labor administration and (2) the enhancement of the linkage between schools and companies at the curriculum level.

The increase in the relative weight of direct support from the labor administration may include the greater role of "Hello Work (public employment security offices)" at senior high schools of general education where there are only several students who find work after graduation.

The labor administration has only recently begun to involve in employment and career development support at universities. Support through job supporters has just started and the quality and scope of support is now being improved and expanded. Career consultants' roles at universities are now under consideration and career consultation programs for universities are being discussed. Support from the labor administration has begun to expand in response to an increase in unemployed university graduates.

The linkage between schools and enterprises at the curriculum level means an effort to pave the way from school to work through cooperation in education between senior high schools/universities and enterprises. But no such linkage has yet become clear in Japanese society.

For this report, therefore, we planned and implemented the following interview survey covering vocational schools that have advanced efforts at the curriculum level.

- (3) Survey on senior high schools' cooperation with industry (hereinafter referred to as industry-school cooperation)

Yamanashi survey in the industrial field (the board of education, the Industry Support Organization, two industrial high schools, and an enterprise)

Hokkaido survey in the welfare field (Hakodate Otsuma High School, three welfare facilities, and Otsuma High School graduates working at these facilities)

Tokyo survey of a school for special needs education (Tokyo Metropolitan Eifuku Gakuen, hereinafter referred to as Eifuku Gakuen)

Summary of findings

Chapter 1 analyzed senior high schools' job guidance and made the following findings:

- (1) The 1980s-type senior high school job guidance, which had been highly evaluated internationally as Japan's ideal job guidance for senior high schools, has declined and now covers only one-fifth of senior high schools at present in the 2010s.
- (2) The 1980s-type senior high school job guidance tends to function well at senior high schools that boast greater numbers of job finders and are located in regions that feature higher

production shares for manufacturing enterprises and better employment situations including lower shares for new graduates who find jobs across prefectural borders. Senior high schools that do not meet the conditions of a better employment situation and a greater number of job finders are opt to refrain from providing specific guidelines for finding jobs and from implementing any in-house selection of students for specific jobs, leaving students to freely conduct job search.

- (3) Based on this survey, the School Basic Survey and a survey on job-offer for new graduates from junior and senior high schools, the labor market is estimated to see an annual influx of 30,000 senior high school graduates who drift in the market while remaining undetected by schools or the labor administration.
- (4) We calculated rates of unemployed graduates who are defined as meeting one of the three conditions – those who found temporary jobs, others and unknown/deceased according to the School Basic Survey. Looking at the rates by region, regions with many senior high schools posting the rates of unemployed graduates at or above 30% included Northern Kanto, Southern Kanto and Kinki. Such rates were lower for regions where manufacturing industry accounts for higher percentage of all industries. By course/department, the industrial course featured the lowest rate of unemployed graduates. It has the highest share of schools of which the rate of unemployed graduates is less than 5%, followed by the agriculture/fisheries and commercial/information courses. On the other hand, the share of schools with rates of unemployed graduates below 5% is low at general education schools and those with vocational courses. These schools also featured a higher share of schools where graduates who have failed their entrance examinations and are continuing to prepare for higher education account for more than half of unemployed graduates.
- (5) Schools with greater numbers of students finding work and higher unemployed graduate rates used non-school organizations more frequently for job-hunting support. Using such organizations least frequently were schools where graduates preparing for higher education account for more than half of unemployed graduates.
- (6) The most frequently cited non-school job-hunting support organizations were the Hello Work (including responses that cited the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and prefectural labor departments). They were cited by 78.0% of responding schools.
- (7) Students are fully made aware of job-hunting support organizations before their graduation and post-graduation consulting arrangements are well established. But the percentage is low for schools that take students to Hello Work offices before they graduate or make them fully aware of vocational experience and training opportunities. Particularly, the percentage is lower among general education schools and those with vocational courses.
- (8) As representative characteristics of unemployed graduates, “they cannot find what to do” was

cited by 55.7% of responding schools, “they do not accept career guidance” by 53.3%, “poor academic results” or “frequent absence from school” by 52.9% and “finicky about something” by 49.6%.

- (9) Asked on views about “freeter” non-regular employees, 88.9% of responding schools said “students should have even part-time jobs rather than having no jobs” and 88.2% answered “freeters should be supported fully to become regular employees.” Nearly 90% of responding schools have these views. As problems on the part of students, “lack of career views or job consciousness” was cited by 80.7%, “unable to think or act as a member of society” by 77.4%, and “a decline in students’ communication capability” by 75.0%.

Given these findings, we made the following three policy proposals:

- (1) Support should be enhanced for senior high schools where job guidance is insufficient. A measure should be considered to have Hello Work offices take the leadership in job-hunting support in place of senior high schools.

Regarding support for senior high schools where job-hunting students are fewer, job supporters and Hello Work offices might have made certain contributions to supporting unemployed graduates. For these schools, however, Hello Work offices should deepen their engagement with job-hunting support to improve unfavorable conditions for unemployed graduates. It could be considered that Hello Work offices would take the leadership in finding jobs for students at some senior high schools, as is the case with junior high schools.

- (2) Information (including lists of enterprises with sufficient training and job turnover data) should be accumulated at senior high schools that have little information due to their weakened relations with enterprises.

Schools that have fewer job-hunting graduates may have difficulties in keeping stable relations with certain enterprises and as a result, graduates find jobs at enterprises that are different from year to year. Information on enterprises as temporary employers of graduates is difficult to be accumulated at schools. A decline in the continuity of relations between senior high schools and enterprises means that information is not kept at schools on enterprises that are ambitious and able to train students.

Therefore, Hello Work offices must build a mechanism to get information on enterprises that are positive about training senior high school students and on senior high school graduates who separate from employment at an early stage. At some Hello Work offices, officials might have accumulated information on “good enterprises” for senior high school students. Given that Hello Work officials are replaced frequently, however, each Hello Work office should make organized efforts to take over such accumulated information.

- (3) The administrative sector should enhance cooperation with senior high schools in effectively supporting potential job-seeking students who are not counted as job seekers.

Job supporters and Hello Work offices are engaged considerably in job-hunting support for senior high school students. Actually, however, job-seeking students alone have been covered under their support. Support for senior high school students who are not job seekers covered under such job-hunting support measures and yet have no plan to go to higher education or find work as regular jobs has still been insufficient.

In order to detect students dropping out of job search activities, Hello Work offices will have to cooperate with senior high schools before their graduation. Hello Work officials working at the forefront of the job-hunting support should share a view that supporting those students who fail to be recognized as unemployed will become an effective policy into the future. Other activities such as regional youth support stations' ongoing outreach programs for senior high schools are also expected to develop in the future.

Chapter 2 took up and analyzed two vocational senior high schools (an industrial school in Yamanashi Prefecture and a welfare school in Hokkaido Prefecture) and a school for special needs education (in Tokyo) as specific cases for the linkage between schools and enterprises at the curriculum level. Each case reflected regional labor market characteristics, imposing constraints on the generalization of findings. But the analysis indicated that the following points are important for relevant policies:

- (1) Coordinating organizations play key roles in bridging senior high schools to enterprises when linkage programs are launched. Coordinators play different roles in respective cases. Yamanashi's Craftman 21 (human resource development project to foster future leaders of manufacturing industries through cooperation between local businesses and industrial high schools) uses a coordinating organization and coordinating persons for exploring enterprises, matching, support and coordination. The school for special needs education in Tokyo uses coordinators' support for enterprises' acceptance of students and Hello Work offices for exploring enterprises for the linkage.
- (2) In forming the partnership between senior high schools and the industry sector, based on the individual relations between senior high schools and enterprises, some continuing platforms are formed where regional stakeholders meet to consider how to develop human resources.
- (3) In order to specify human resources for development and find specific needs, senior high schools use various measures including 1) questionnaires for and meetings with enterprises, 2) setting vocational qualifications as one of the targets, 3) sharing goals, exchanging information on training methods and coordinating in workplace training of students, 4) inviting citizen

instructors, and 5) workplace training of senior high school teachers.

- (4) Skill development and network-building support measures are implemented to boost students' adaptability to changes, including students' acquisition of qualifications in areas neighboring their major fields, exchanges between graduates and current students, and a program for students to visit Hello Work offices together with their teachers and parents.

Given the above findings, the following policy measures may be effective:

- (1) Hello Work offices should serve as coordinators for promoting community-wide consciousness of cooperation in human resources development and designing programs for developing desirable human resources.

In the first step for industry-school cooperation in education, senior high schools and enterprises must share consciousness of cooperation in developing human resources required by regional industries or enterprises. If schools have no sufficient relations with regional enterprises, coordinators that bridge between schools and the industry sector will hold the key.

For example, Hello Work offices that have contacts both with senior high schools and enterprises, as well as job supporters who have information on the labor market and individual enterprises, may engage in selecting areas for easier regional cooperation based on regional labor market and growth industry information, while specifying human resources that senior high schools and enterprises should develop within regional communities and building role-sharing platforms. As vocational qualifications are one of the targets for human resources that both senior high schools and enterprises commonly seek to develop, a measure should be considered to reduce costs for senior high school students to acquire vocational qualifications. Vocational training organizations may serve as skill brokers to detect the needs of senior high schools and enterprises and put such needs into specific cooperation programs.

- (2) Hello Work information should be utilized for figuring out industry sector needs and reflecting them in education.

Students' workplace training provides a precious contact between school teachers and the workplace. Steady efforts to exchange opinions on training plans and objectives as well as on training methods, to implement teachers' circuit guidance during workplace training, and to feed the training and guidance back into school education may provide opportunities for senior high schools and enterprises to share their education consciousness at the workplace level. Continuous training for school teachers related to their respective major fields may help to upgrade their skills, understand the actual situation of local industries and improve guidance. Information held by Hello Work offices may effectively be used for employing regional vocational training organizations for training, for promoting school teachers' exploration of trainee-accepting enterprises and their matching between

students and these enterprises and for sending lecturers from enterprises to schools.

(3) Job information should be provided to school teachers to help foster students' adaptability to changes.

Efforts to improve students' adaptability are effective for education responding to regional industry needs. In addition to workplace training, it is also important for students to acquire knowledge about labor markets, labor law, job-hunting support, post-graduation lifetime vocational education, job card training and so on. First, the administrative sector should expand information provision to teachers.

Chapter 3 analyzed realities and challenges involving universities' present job-hunting and career development support.

- (1) Recent changes in university students' job-hunting efforts include widening gaps among their efforts. While an increasing number of students strongly feel mental stress and give up job-hunting efforts, the number of job offers that universities can introduce to students is declining and students depend too much on the Internet information. These changes have been recognized at many universities and especially remarkable at middle- and lower-ranked private universities. Particularly at universities with higher unemployed graduate rates, a growing number of students give up job-hunting efforts while job placement divisions and career centers at universities fail to grasp the situations of students. At these universities, students tend to seek jobs at famous enterprises. At universities with lower rates of unemployed graduates, in contrast, no such tendency is seen and students increasingly participate in job-hunting support events.
- (2) At universities with higher unemployed graduate rates, more students have problems that have existed since before they entered the universities. Some students fail to write entry sheets, stumbling in the initial phase of job-hunting efforts. Such universities strongly recognize declines in their students' basic academic skills, their sociality and their communications capabilities, and are aware of their guidance failing to sufficiently support their students.
- (3) We analyzed how career development support arrangements and their implementation at universities in 2005 influenced the number of unemployed graduates between 2005 and 2010. Primarily, no positive effect was seen. When the impact of unemployed graduate rates in 2005 was controlled, however, we saw a sign that the career development support expansion worked to reduce unemployed graduates.
- (4) As tens of thousands of students send entry sheets to each enterprise amid the expansion of the university graduate labor market through Internet-based information provision, a number of enterprises use characteristics of universities and academic skills to select those subject to interviews in a preliminary phase.

- (5) At 40% of universities, enterprises conduct “on-campus recruit” programs to directly recruit students. Such programs are implemented at middle- and lower-ranked universities as well.
- (6) University guidance has not been provided enough for linking unemployed graduates or early job quitters to public support. Only 60% of universities advise students individually of public support organizations. Less than half of universities teach students on vocational experiences and training for new graduates.

Given the above, the following policies are to be considered:

- (1) The labor administration should increase its engagement with and support for career centers and job placement divisions at universities.

While “Hello Work for new graduates” and other arrangements to directly support students’ job-hunting efforts outside universities must be developed, support must be provided for operations of career centers and job placement divisions at universities in order to enhance their functions. Universities’ organized support that reaches students may help prevent students from giving up job-hunting efforts. Effective support may include the provision of non-Internet-based information accumulated at Hello Work offices to universities.

- (2) “On-campus recruitment” opportunities should be increased.

The university graduate labor market has expanded through Internet-based information and increased its inefficiency. In a manner to supplement the inefficient market, universities may create “small markets” by increasing “on-campus recruitment” opportunities through which they develop direct relations with regional small and medium-sized enterprises. Contacts between universities and enterprises are important to this end. In this respect, regional enterprise information at Hello Work offices is effective. The labor administration can help create this kind of contacts between universities and regional enterprises that have (potential) demand for university graduates.

- (3) Support should be narrowly focused and improved qualitatively.

Support should be focused on middle- and lower-ranked private universities, particularly their cultural and social science faculties, which are apt to bring about a number of unemployed graduates. Skill and knowledge standards for career consulting at universities should be set to improve the quality of consulting. At the same time, practical education should be provided on rights and obligations of workers and employers, consulting organizations, job-hunting support systems and so on.

- (4) Unemployed graduates should be guided to public support or vocational training.

Not a small number of universities have consulting arrangements for unemployed graduates. Practically, however, they have problems. In order to prevent unemployed graduates from being

isolated, it is important to guide them to public support. But these graduates have not been well informed about public support. In addition to the information provided by universities, unemployed graduates should also be guided to public support through other channels including the Internet. In cases where job-hunting efforts fail to produce favorable results, trial employment, job card systems and other general vocational training systems to lower hurdles to getting jobs may be put into a menu of support options.

While there are various arguments about the system for the simultaneous recruitment of new graduates, the system is expected to remain for the immediate future.

The simultaneous recruitment of new graduates features a smooth school-work transition as a merit. But it has a demerit in that it leaves some students to drop out of the transition. Such systems as financial aid for unemployed graduates within three years from their graduation have been developed to ease the demerit (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/2010/01/tp0127-2/10.html>).

We expect that such support will be combined with cooperation between schools (senior high schools and universities) and the labor administration in matching job supply and demand, and curriculums with workplace demand to promote support for youths.