

OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising Practices

Hiring the Best Teachers: The Role of the Teachers' Employment Examination in Japan

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Japan from 5-9 September 2016.

The OECD review team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Francesca Caena (University of Venice), Kjetil Helgeland (OECD) and Danielle Toon (Learning First) – identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising Practice 5.
Hiring the Best Teachers: The Role of the Teachers’
Employment Examination in Japan

Context

In Japan, teacher certification is awarded by the (prefectural) Boards of Education (BOE) to all teacher candidates who have completed an initial teacher education (ITE) programme (Table 1). There are 64 BOEs in the 47 prefectures and 17 municipalities of designated states in Japan. The BOEs have a large role in organising and delivering ITE, selecting and hiring teachers, and organising induction in Japan.

Table 1. Number of students graduated with normal teaching license(s) from graduate, undergraduate, or junior college programs (2017)

	Categories	# of Teacher Candidate Licensed	% Total	National Universities & Programs for Teacher Preparation	Open System set under National Universities	Municiple and Private Universities
ISCED 1	Graduate School	23,535	5.3	4.5	0.3	0.5
	Undergraduate Program		92.1	38.6	2.1	51.4
	Junior College		2.6	-	-	-
	TOTAL (%)		100.0	43.1	2.4	51.9
ISCED 2	Graduate School	45,288	9.1	4.0	1.8	3.3
	Undergraduate Program		89.5	22.7	6.3	60.5
	Junior College		1.4	-	-	-
	TOTAL (%)		100.0	26.6	8.1	63.9

Source: MEXT, Office of Policy on Educational Human Resources Division, January 2019.

However, in order to be eligible for a tenured teaching position in a public school, certified teachers must sit the Teachers’ Employment Examination, which is administered by BOEs every year. Each BOE sets its own standards and requirements for the Teachers’ Employment Examination. Most BOEs use a first- and second-stage examination to ensure candidate suitability. First- and second-stage examinations often take place in July and August, respectively. Examinations typically consist of:

- written examination testing general knowledge (see Box 1), subject-based knowledge, professional knowledge and essay writing
- interview (individual (*in 68 BOEs*), group (*in 50 BOEs*) and/or private sector (*in 60 BOEs*))
- practical examination

- aptitude test (*in 41 BOEs, of which 32 in second-stage*)
- mock lesson (*in 40 BOEs*) and drafting lesson plans (*in 16 BOEs*).

Box 1. Example of question from the Tokushima Board of Education Teachers' Employment Examination, General Knowledge (2015)

Question 39

In the Law Promoting the Prevention of Bullying proclaimed on the 28th Jun 2013, which of the following is not an indicator that the recommended policy measures have been implemented in a school? Choose one.

1. The completion of morals education
2. The implementation of measures for early identification
3. The establishment of a counselling system
4. A guarantee to provide staff to carry out bullying prevention, etc.
5. The promotion of a policy that tackles online bullying

Source: Jensen, B. et al. (2016^[2]), *Not So Elementary: Primary School Teacher Quality in Top-Performing Systems*, Learning First, Melbourne, Appendix, <http://natctr.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Japan-Tokushima-2015-Employment-Exam-General-Knowledge-v1.pdf>.

First-stage examinations typically test general knowledge, subject-based knowledge and professional knowledge. Some BOEs administer essay writing, interview, practical and aptitude test in the second-stage examination. Some BOEs administer essay writing and/or interview in both first- and second-stage examinations.

What is the role of the Teachers' Employment Examination?

The Teachers' Employment Examination is an important driver of quality of teacher candidates and ITE programmes in Japan.

Commonly, about one third of certified teachers are hired after sitting the Teachers' Employment Examination in primary education and less than 15% of new graduates in lower and upper secondary education. Most certified teachers have sat the examination previously, often multiple times (Table 2). In private schools, certified teachers also need to sit the examinations, but these are typically administered by individual schools.

Graduates do not “pass” or “fail” using a minimum-standards approach. Rather, the top-ranking graduates are placed into a local hiring pool by the Board of Education, thus aligning teacher supply and demand. Those who pass the examination have tenured employment status and are eligible for one year of induction, also provided by the BOE. Those who are not hired can become temporary teachers and/or resit the exam the following year.

Table 2. Total number of certified teachers hired after sitting the Teachers' Employment Examination in Japan (2016)

Total certified teachers...	Type of certified teacher	Primary education	Lower secondary education	Upper secondary education	Special Education Schools
...who sat the Teachers' Employment Exam	New graduates	18 231	18 331	10 608	2 092
		34%	31%	30%	20%
	Previous graduates	35 375	40 745	25 072	8 509
		66%	69%	70%	80%
	Total	53 606	59 076	35 680	10 601
...who passed and were employed after sitting the Teachers' Employment Exam	New graduates	6 320	2 623	1 547	805
		43%	32%	30%	28%
	Previous graduates	8 379	5 654	3 561	2 041
		57%	68%	70%	72%
	Total	14 699	8 277	5 108	2 846
Hiring (or competition) rate	New graduates	35%	14%	15%	39%
	Previous graduates	24%	14%	14%	24%
	Total	27%	14%	14%	27%

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2017_[3]). Report on Public School Teacher Recruitment for 2016 Fiscal Year, http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/senkou/1381770.htm (accessed 31 January 2017).

Most Boards of Education publish data on the number of certified teachers who sit the Teachers' Employment Examination (x), the number of candidate teachers who passed the Teachers' Employment Examination and were subsequently employed (y) – and the hiring (or competition) rate (x/y). For example, in the Tokyo Prefecture, 13 555 certified teachers sat the Teachers' Employment Examination in 2018, of which 3 027 were hired, resulting in a hiring rate of 4.4 (Tokyo Prefecture, 2018_[4]). Japanese universities also report on the number of applicants and enrolments in ITE programmes (see **Promising Practice 7. Annual reporting of data on initial teacher education programmes in Japan**).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) also publishes data on the hiring rate of universities and university programmes, creating high levels of competition between universities – and, in principle, incentives to improve their programmes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2018_[5]).

Why is it a strength?

The OECD Review Team in its review of Japan from 5-8 September 2016 concluded that the Teachers' Employment Examination is a strength in that:

- It is developed by each Board of Education so that *local needs can be addressed*. For example, some BOEs use interviews to assess suitability and motivation for teaching.
- It ensures that new teachers have a *very high degree of content knowledge*.
- It has helped to *maintain the status of the teaching profession* as the examination is highly competitive and encourages teacher education programmes to continuously improve what they do to ensure their graduates score highly on the examination.

- It is aligned with supply and demand (see Table 2) in that, while many students enter initial teacher education programmes, only those few with requisite skills and knowledge secure a job as a result of the examination.

How could it be improved?

However, the OECD Review Team also noted that:

- *In some Boards of Education, there may be a mismatch between the Teachers' Employment Examination and the content of ITE.* The employment examination does not always reflect the latest developments in the programmes, such as risk management and how to deal with parents.
- *Parts of the Teachers' Employment Examination can overlap in function with the teaching certificate.* If standards in teacher education are high, the teacher certificate should be sufficient to prove content knowledge, and the employment examination could focus on the graduate's practical aptitude and fit to the local context.

For further information

- Jensen, B. et al. (2016), *Not So Elementary: Primary School Teacher Quality in Top-Performing Systems*, National Center on Education and the Economy, Washington, D.C, http://ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/169726_Not_So_Elementary_Report_041317.pdf. [2]
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2018), *News release: [Graduates employed, by national teacher training university in Japan] (in Japanese)*, http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/29/02/1381825.htm (accessed on 11 March 2018). [5]
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- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2016), *Country Background Report. OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study. Japan*, MEXT, Tokyo. [1]
- Tokyo Prefecture (2018), *[Results of the March 29 Tokyo Public School Teachers' Employment Candidate Selection] (in Japanese)*, http://www.kyoiku.metro.tokyo.jp/press/press_release/2017/release20171013.html (accessed on 11 March 2018). [4]