

Background: Vocational Education in Hebei Province

Hebei Province is located in Northern China and surrounds the municipalities of Beijing and Tianjin. With a population of around 75 million, it is a major industrial province and an integral part of the wider Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei economic region.

The province has a large and diverse higher education sector, with more than 120 universities and higher education institutions, including comprehensive universities, specialist institutions and vocational colleges. Vocational education plays an important role in supporting regional industry and skills development.

Historically, however, vocational education outcomes in Hebei have not consistently kept pace with changes in regional economic demand, particularly at higher technical levels. In response, vocational education reform has become a priority for both provincial and central government, with an emphasis on improving curriculum standards, strengthening teaching quality and better aligning provision with industry needs. Recent reform efforts have focused in particular on Level 4 and Level 5 vocational education.

Within this context, capacity-building for teaching staff has been identified as a key challenge. The applied teaching skills required to deliver higher-level vocational programmes are not yet widely embedded across higher education institutions, prompting interest in structured staff development and international cooperation.

The Hebei Provincial Association for UNESCO (HPAU) plays a central coordinating role in vocational education activity in the province. It is staffed by former senior officials from the Hebei Provincial Education Department and is the only organisation in Hebei Province accredited to deliver Pearson vocational qualifications. HPAU is also accredited to deliver Cambridge International programmes, including IELTS, A Levels and IGCSEs.

In 2023, HPAU established the Hebei International Vocational Education Development Alliance. The Alliance brings together universities, vocational colleges, government departments and international partners to support vocational

education reform, curriculum development, teacher training and international cooperation. It provides a formal platform for collaboration rather than delivering programmes directly.

International organisations involved in discussions around the Alliance include bodies such as Pearson Education, which works globally on vocational qualifications and curriculum frameworks. To date, activity has focused on consultation and partnership development.