

Education at a Glance 2023

Country note

Japan

This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Japan. It draws on data from *Education at a Glance 2023*. In line with the thematic focus of this year's *Education at a Glance*, it emphasises vocational education and training (VET), while also covering other parts of the education system. Data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data are referred to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2023*.

Highlights

- Vocational programmes at the upper secondary level attract a relatively small share of young people in Japan. Amongst those aged 15-19, only 12% are enrolled in upper secondary vocational programmes, while the average in OECD countries is 23%.
- Short-cycle tertiary programmes are the second most common level of education for new entrants into tertiary education among OECD countries, but their importance differs widely across countries. Such programmes are popular in Japan, with 35% of first-time entrants to tertiary education choosing this level of education, compared to 19% on average across the OECD.
- In spite of challenges to international movement resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, international student mobility persisted in many OECD countries. In Japan, although the number of international students decreased due to the pandemic, the share of these students at tertiary level remained between 5% and 6% in 2019-2021.
- Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Japan spends USD 13 006 annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power), compared to the OECD average of USD 12 647. In 2020, Japan spent 4.1% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions, while OECD countries spent 5.1% of GDP on average.
- On average across OECD countries and other participants, instruction in reading, writing and literature and in mathematics accounts for 41% of compulsory instruction time at primary level and 27% of compulsory instruction time at lower secondary level. In Japan, these subjects account for 39% of instruction time for primary school students and 24% of instruction time for lower secondary school students. At the same time, a relatively large share of instruction time at these levels in Japan is devoted to “other subjects,” including, among others, the Period for Integrated Studies and student-led activities (*Tokkatsu*). At primary level, 13% of instruction time is devoted to other subjects, while other subjects account for 12% of instruction time at lower secondary level, compared to OECD averages of 4% and 3%, respectively.
- The salaries of upper secondary teachers (with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience) decreased in real terms in many OECD countries between 2015 and 2022. This was also the case in Japan, where they decreased by 2% in real terms between 2015 and 2022.

Access to education, participation and progress

- Participation in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) has a positive effect on children's well-being, learning and development in the first years of their lives. In Japan, 9% of 2-year-olds are enrolled in ECE and 53% in other registered Early Childhood Education and Care services. This increases to 89% of 3-year-olds, 98% of 4-year-olds and 97% of 5-year-olds.
- Compulsory education in Japan starts at the age of 6 and continues until the age of 15. Students can typically graduate from age 17 from general upper secondary programmes. (Here, the typical age refers to the age of the students at the beginning of the school year; most students will be 18 when they graduate at the end of the school year.) Students also typically graduate from vocational upper secondary programmes at age 17 onwards. This is different from most OECD countries, where graduates from vocational upper secondary programmes have a wider age range, reflecting the greater diversity of pathways into these programmes than for general ones.
- Vocational programmes at the upper secondary level attract a relatively small share of young people in Japan. Amongst those aged 15-19, only 12% are enrolled in upper secondary vocational programmes, while the average in OECD countries is 23%.
- Bachelor's programmes are the most popular programmes for new entrants to tertiary education. On average across the OECD, they attract 76% of all new students compared to 63% in Japan. Short-cycle tertiary programmes are the second most common level of education for new entrants into tertiary education, but their importance differs widely across countries. In Japan, they are chosen by 35% of all new entrants.
- Perhaps surprisingly, the share of international students at tertiary level has not been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in many OECD countries. However, a few countries experienced double digit declines in the share of international students. Japan is not one of them, as the share of international students remained between 5% and 6% between 2019 and 2021.

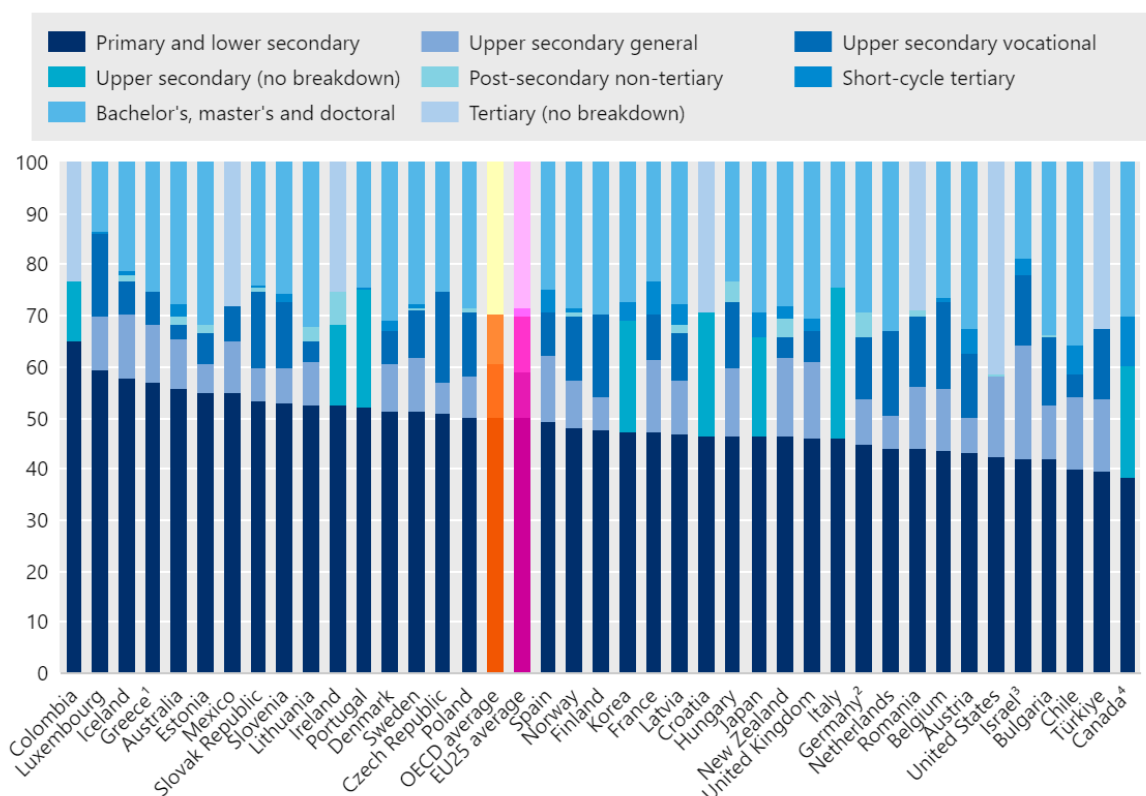
Financial resources invested in education

- All OECD and partner countries devote a substantial share of their domestic output to education. In 2020, OECD countries spent on average 5.1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In Japan, the corresponding share was 4.1% of GDP, of which 29% was dedicated to primary education, 17% to lower secondary education, 19% to upper secondary and post-secondary education combined, 5% to short-cycle tertiary programmes and 29% to bachelor's, master's and doctoral or equivalent programmes (Figure 1). Of note, spending on short-cycle tertiary programmes as a share of GDP devoted to educational institutions was higher in Japan than in all but three other OECD countries with available data.
- Funding for education in absolute terms is strongly influenced by countries' income levels. Countries with higher per capita GDP tend to spend more per student than those with lower per capita GDP. Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Japan spends USD 13 006 annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power), compared to the OECD average of USD 12 647. Annual expenditure per student is equivalent to 30% of annual per capita GDP, which is above the OECD average of 27%. Strong expenditure at tertiary level helps to explain this, with expenditure per student equivalent to 49% of per capita GDP in Japan, compared to the OECD average of 38%. At all other levels of education, Japan is either at or slightly above the corresponding OECD average.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for education systems across the world. On average across the OECD, expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time equivalent student (including expenditure on research and development) grew by 0.4%

from 2019 to 2020 (the first year of the pandemic and the latest period with available data). In Japan, it increased by 1.4%. This change in expenditure per student is the result of total expenditure on educational institutions increasing by 0.7% and the total number of full-time equivalent students decreasing by 0.8%.

Figure 1. Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions, by level of education (2020)

In per cent



1. Year of reference differs from 2020. Refer to the source table for more details.
2. Upper secondary vocational programmes include lower secondary vocational programmes.
3. Upper secondary programmes include lower secondary programmes.
4. Primary education includes pre-primary programmes.

Countries are ranked in descending order of total expenditure on primary and lower secondary institutions.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table C2.1. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

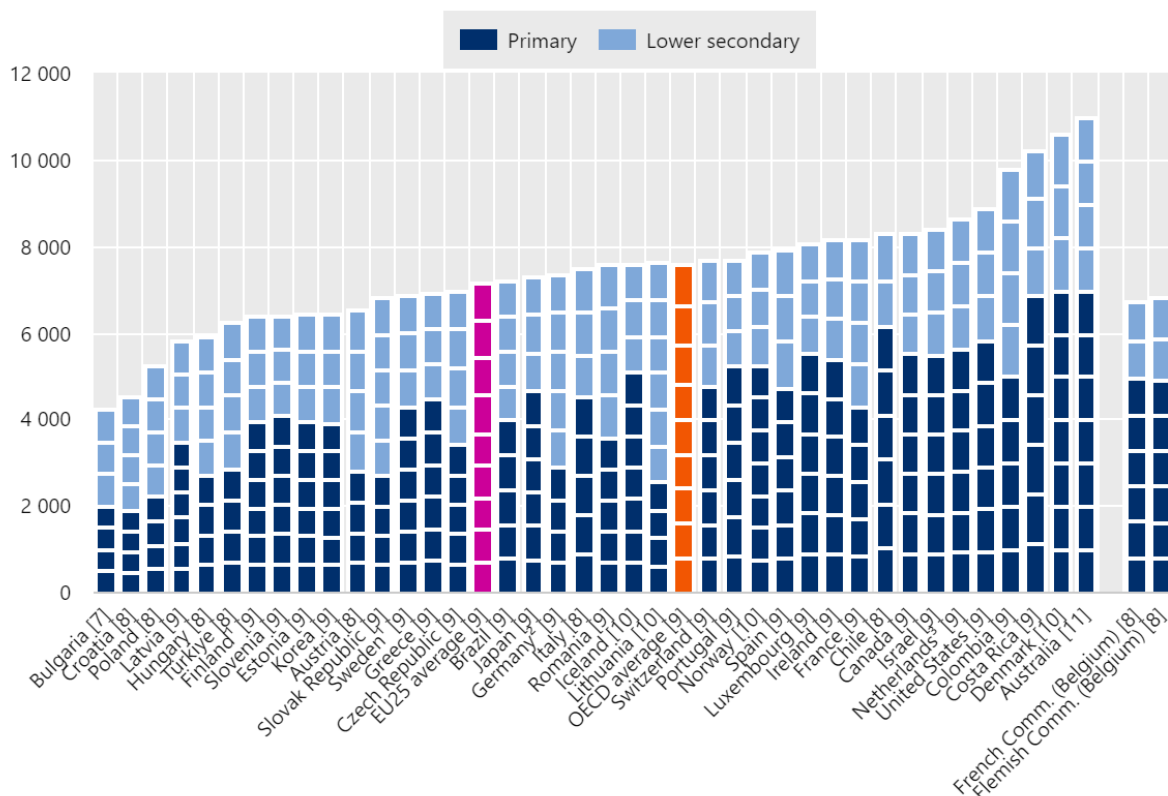
- Government sources dominate non-tertiary education funding in all OECD countries, while the private sector contributes 9% of the total expenditure on educational institutions on average. Private funding in Japan accounted for 7% of expenditure at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels.
- On average across OECD countries, more than half of government expenditure on primary to post-secondary non-tertiary education comes from subnational governments. In Japan, 1% of the funding comes from the central government, after transfers between government levels, 29% from the regional level and 70% from the local level.

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- The total compulsory instruction time throughout primary and lower secondary education varies widely from country to country (Figure 2). Across the OECD, over the course of primary and lower secondary education, compulsory instruction time totals an average of 7 634 hours, distributed over nine grades. In Japan, the total compulsory instruction time is lower, at 7 338 hours, over nine grades.

Figure 2. Compulsory instruction time in general education (2023)

In hours, in primary and lower secondary education, in public institutions



Note: Instruction hours for each grade refer to average hours per grade for the level of education. Numbers in square brackets refer to the total number of years for primary and lower secondary education.

1. Estimated number of hours by level of education based on the average number of hours per year, as for some subjects, the allocation of instruction time across multiple levels is flexible.

2. Year of reference 2022.

3. The number of grades in lower secondary education is three or four, depending on the track. The fourth year of pre-vocational secondary education was excluded from the calculation.

Countries and other participants are ranked in ascending order of the total number of compulsory instruction hours.

Source: OECD (2023), Table D1.1. For more information see *Source* section and [Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes](#) (OECD, 2023^[1]).

- On average across OECD countries, 25% of the compulsory instruction time in primary education is devoted to reading, writing and literature and 16% to mathematics. In lower secondary education, the share is 15% for reading, writing and literature and 13% for mathematics. In Japan, 23% of instruction time is devoted to reading, writing and literature and 16% to mathematics at primary

level compared to 12% each to both subjects at lower secondary level. The relatively low share of instruction time devoted to reading, writing and literature and mathematics is due in part to the relatively large share of instruction time devoted to “other subjects,” which include Home Economics, Living Environment Studies, the Period for Integrated Studies and student-led activities (*Tokkatsu*) at primary level and Technology and Home Economics, the Period for Integrated Studies and student-led activities (*Tokkatsu*) at lower secondary level. At primary level, 13% of instruction time is devoted to these other subjects, while other subjects account for 12% of instruction time at lower secondary level, compared to OECD averages of 4% and 3%, respectively.

- Teachers’ salaries are an important determinant of the attractiveness of the teaching profession, but they also represent the single largest expenditure category in formal education. In most OECD countries, the salaries of teachers in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach, and also with experience. On average, annual statutory salaries for upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience are USD 53 456 across the OECD. In Japan, the corresponding salary adjusted for purchasing power is USD 47 349, which is equivalent to JPY 5 549 000.
- Between 2015 and 2022, statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes (with the most prevalent qualification and 15 years of experience) declined in real terms in roughly half of all OECD countries with available data. In Japan, upper secondary teachers’ salaries decreased by 2% between 2015 and 2022.
- National/central assessments (standardised tests with no consequence on students’ progression through school or certification) are more common at primary and lower secondary levels than at upper secondary level, while most OECD countries conduct national/central examinations (standardised tests with formal consequence) in the final years of upper secondary education. These national/central assessments and examinations take place at different grades and can have different periodicities, and their contents may vary over years and/or across students and are not necessarily compulsory for students. In Japan, there is one national/central assessment at primary level and one at lower secondary level. At upper secondary level, there is no national/central assessment that all students are expected to take. There is no national/central examination at any level.

References

- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>. [1]
- OECD (2023), Education at a Glance Database, <https://stats.oecd.org/>. [2]
- OECD (2023), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>. [3]

More information

For more information on *Education at a Glance 2023* and to access the full set of indicators, see: <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>.

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, see *Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>).

For general information on the methodology, please refer to the *OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics 2018* (<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en>).

Updated data can be found on line at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-data-en> and by following the *StatLinks 2* under the tables and charts in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS:

<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/>.

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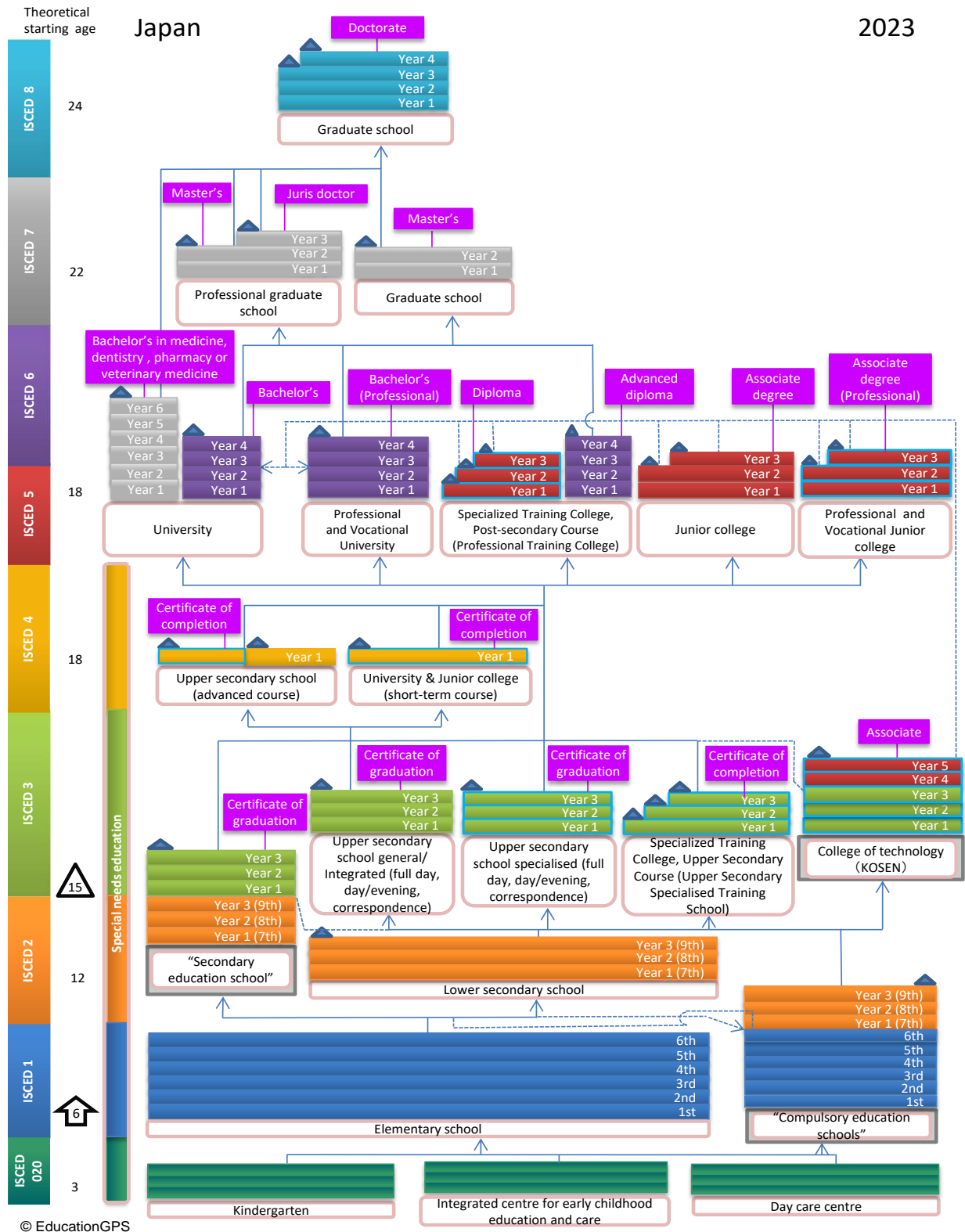
Key facts for Japan in *Education at a Glance 2023*

Indicator	Country		OECD average		Source	
Educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		Table A1.2	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	m	m	16%		12%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	m	m	44%		35%
	Tertiary	62%	69%	41%	54%	
NEET rates of 18-24 year-olds by gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	m	m	14%	15.5%		
Employment rates of 25-64 year-olds by educational attainment and gender	2022		2022		OECD (2023 ^[2])	
	% Men	% Women	% Men	% Women		
	Below upper secondary	m	m	70%		48%
	Upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary	m	m	84%		69%
	Tertiary	94%	80%	90%	83%	
Enrolment rate of children aged 3 in ECEC	2021		2021		Table B2.1	
	89%		73%			
Enrolment rate of 15-19 year-olds	2021		2021		Table B1.1	
	m		84%			
Share of upper secondary students enrolled in VET programmes	2021		2021		Table B1.3	
	22%		44%			
Upper secondary completion rates by programme orientation	2021		2021		Table B3.1	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	By the end of the programme duration	m	m	77%		62%
Two years after the end of the programme duration	m	m	87%	73%		
Expenditure on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student by level of education (in USD PPP)	2020		2020		Table C1.1	
	Primary	USD 10 057	USD 10 658			
	Lower secondary	USD 11 618	USD 11 941			
	Upper secondary	USD 12 458	USD 12 312			
	Tertiary	USD 19 676	USD 18 105			
Total expenditure on primary to tertiary educational institutions as % of GDP	2020		2020		Table C2.1	
	4.1%		5.1%			
Share of total education expenditure on upper secondary educational institutions by programme orientation	2020		2020		Figure C2.2	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational		
	m	m	11%	10%		
Total compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education	2023		2023		Table D1.1	
	7 338 hours		7 634 hours			
Statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in USD PPP)	2022		2022		Table D3.1.	
	USD 47 349		USD 53 456			
Change in statutory salaries of upper secondary teachers in general programmes with the most prevalent qualifications after 15 years of experience (in real terms)	2015-2022		2015-2022		Table D3.7	
	-2%		4%			
Share of teachers in general upper secondary programmes aged 50 or older	2021		2021		Table D7.2.	
	m		39%			

Note: The OECD average for completion rates reflects a different country coverage (see Indicator B3).

Source: OECD (2023^[2])

Diagram of the education system



Source: OECD (2023), "Japan: Diagram of education system", OECD Education GPS, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/JPN/JPN_2011_EN.pdf
 Please refer to "Japan: Diagram of education system" for information on the keys.