

# Construction of the Mechanism for Collaborative and Innovative Development of Vocational Education, Higher Education and Continuing Education

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**Abstract:** In the context of building lifelong learning systems and advancing educational modernization, the collaborative and innovative development of vocational education, higher education and continuing education (collectively termed "Three Educations") has become a key solution to address critical challenges such as fragmented educational resources, misalignment between talent cultivation and industry demands, and inadequate lifelong learning pathways. However, the current mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations" still faces core issues including ambiguous boundaries of responsibilities among stakeholders, inefficient resource sharing, disjointed talent cultivation mechanisms, lack of evaluation and supervision systems and weak support mechanisms. To address these challenges, targeted institutional pathways can be developed from five core dimensions-namely, multi-stakeholder collaborative governance, optimized resource integration, integrated talent cultivation, diversified collaborative evaluation and supervision, and comprehensive support mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education; Higher Education; Continuing Education; Collaborative and Innovative Development; Mechanism

## 1. Introduction

In the new era, China's high-quality economic and social development has created an increasingly urgent demand for highly skilled technical professionals, innovative talents and lifelong learners, which places higher demands on the coordination and innovation of the national education system. Relevant national policies have explicitly emphasized the importance of "coordinating the collaborative

and innovative development of vocational education, higher education and continuing education, promoting the integration of vocational and general education, industry-education collaboration, and science-education convergence", elevating the coordinated innovation of "Three Educations" to the strategic level of national education development. Currently, China's "Three Educations" still exhibit significant fragmentation. Vocational education focuses on skill training yet lacks theoretical support; higher education emphasizes academic research but is deficient in practical orientation; continuing education prioritizes skill upgrading while suffering from resource scarcity. The three sectors lack effective coordination in talent cultivation objectives, curriculum design and resource allocation methods, leading to prominent issues such as wasted educational resources, disconnection between talent development and market demands, and inadequate lifelong learning pathways. According to survey data from 12 institutions in Guangdong, Zhejiang and Shandong provinces, 62.3% of students reported obstacles in cross-type educational credit transfer, while 58.1% of institutions cited insufficient incentives for resource sharing. Establishing a sound integrated mechanism for the collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations"-by breaking down educational barriers, integrating high-quality educational resources and optimizing operational processes-has become a crucial measure for advancing the transformation and upgrading of the education system and serving the national talent strategy.

## 2. Constituent Elements of the Mechanism for Collaborative and Innovative Development of "Three Educations"

The mechanism for the collaborative and

innovative development of "Three Educations" is an organic system featuring multiple subjects, links and dimensions. Its core elements can be

divided into three interrelated and synergistic categories: subjects, operations and safeguards, as shown in Figure 1.

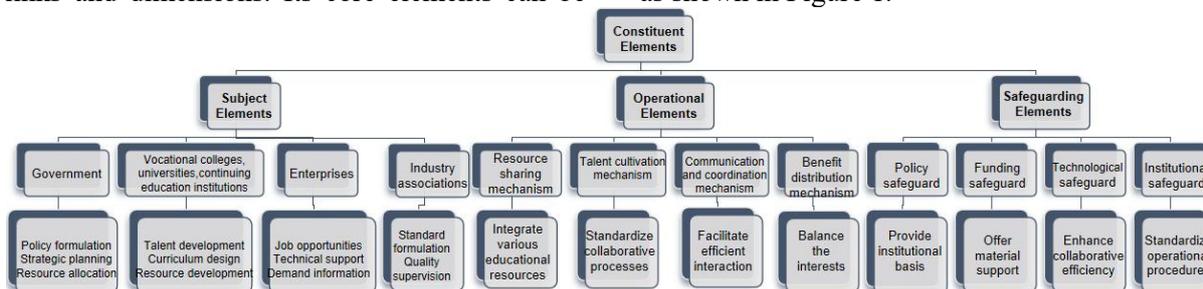


Figure 1. Framework of Constituent Elements of the Mechanism for Collaborative and Innovative Development of "Three Educations"

### 2.1 Subject Elements

The mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations" involves key stakeholders including the government, vocational colleges, universities, continuing education institutions, enterprises and industry associations. The government assumes a guiding role in policy formulation, strategic planning and resource allocation. Vocational colleges, universities and continuing education institutions serve as the core implementers, focusing on talent development, curriculum design and resource development. Enterprises act as demand-driven entities, offering job opportunities, technical support and workforce demand information. Industry associations handle standard formulation and quality supervision. Each stakeholder contributes to the collaboration of "Three Educations" based on their core objectives: the government ensures educational equity and talent supply alignment; educational institutions and continuing education providers optimize resources and enhance teaching quality; enterprises prioritize talent suitability and technology transfer efficiency; while learners seek smooth pathways for lifelong development.

### 2.2 Operational Elements

The mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations" comprises four key components: resource sharing, talent cultivation, communication and coordination, and benefit distribution. These form the core framework ensuring smooth implementation of collaborative and innovative activities. Specifically, the resource sharing mechanism integrates diverse educational resources; the talent cultivation mechanism

standardizes collaborative processes; the communication and coordination mechanism facilitates efficient interaction among stakeholders; and the benefit distribution mechanism balances the interests of all parties involved.

### 2.3 Safeguarding Elements

The safeguarding elements of the mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations" encompass policy, funding, technological and institutional frameworks, serving as the foundational support for the long-term operation of this mechanism. Policy safeguards provide the institutional basis for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations," funding safeguards offer material support, technological safeguards enhance collaborative efficiency, and institutional safeguards standardize operational procedures.

## 3. Current Situation and Existing Problems of the Mechanism for Collaborative and Innovative Development of "Three Educations"

### 3.1 Preliminary Progress in Mechanism Construction

In recent years, under the positive guidance of national policies, the construction of the mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations" has made remarkable progress.

First, the policy guidance system has been gradually refined. The state has successively issued policy documents such as the "Implementation Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Promoting the Reform of Continuing Education of Academic Degrees in

Ordinary Higher Education Institutions in the New Era" and the "Outline of the Plan for Building China into an Education Power (2024-2035)", which clearly define the direction and requirements for the coordinated development of "Three Educations". Local governments have formulated implementation guidelines in line with these central directives, including Zhejiang Province's "Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Modern Vocational Education System" and Jining City's "Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Construction of Modern Vocational Education System", both specifying concrete measures to promote the coordination of "Three Educations".

Second, pilot programs for collaborative practices have been initiated. Various regions have conducted trials in credit recognition, resource sharing and faculty exchange. For instance, Guangdong Province has established a seamless training mechanism integrating vocational and higher education, implementing talent development models like "3+2" and "4+0". Some universities have collaborated with continuing education institutions to offer non-degree training programs, achieving resource sharing.

Third, the industry-education integration mechanism has advanced steadily, and enterprises have demonstrated a growing willingness to participate in the coordinated development of "Three Educations". Through joint efforts such as establishing training bases, co-developing courses and implementing order-based training programs, the alignment between education and industrial needs has been effectively promoted.

### **3.2 Core Problems in Mechanism Construction**

First, the collaborative framework among stakeholders remains underdeveloped, with ambiguous delineation of responsibilities. Achieving coordinated development among vocational education, higher education and continuing education is a complex systemic project, demanding collaboration from multiple stakeholders, including government, academic institutions, students, enterprises and society<sup>[1]</sup>. Currently, the collaboration of "Three Educations" primarily manifests as government-led pilot projects and has yet to establish a sustainable multi-stakeholder

collaborative framework. The ambiguous division of responsibilities among the government, educational institutions and enterprises has led to excessive governmental intervention, passive participation of educational institutions and low motivation of enterprises to participate. The absence of effective communication platforms and decision-making mechanisms has led to fragmented and short-term collaborative initiatives, hindering collective progress. For instance, credit transfer pilot programs in some regions remain limited to specific courses due to insufficient proactive coordination among institutions, making it difficult to implement such programs on a larger scale.

Second, inadequate resource-sharing mechanisms lead to inefficient allocation. On the one hand, the lack of unified standards for resource sharing results in discrepancies in content formats and technical specifications among vocational training resources, higher education academic resources and continuing education resources, hindering effective integration. On the other hand, the development of sharing platforms lags behind, with most existing platforms being limited to single institutions or specific educational types, lacking comprehensive cross-type and cross-regional platforms that would eliminate the "resource silos" phenomenon. Moreover, the absence of incentive mechanisms for sharing, coupled with unclear ownership of high-quality educational resources and imperfect profit-sharing mechanisms during the sharing process, discourages institutions from actively participating in resource sharing. For instance, some universities only offer their high-quality online courses to their own students, limiting their accessibility to vocational colleges and continuing education learners.

Third, the talent co-cultivation mechanism exhibits disconnection issues, with training quality requiring enhancement. To begin with, the alignment of training objectives is inadequate. The lack of coordinated planning among vocational education, higher education and continuing education results in fragmented talent development chains that fail to meet students' lifelong development needs and market demands. In addition, the curriculum system lacks synergy. The course content of these three types of education shows repetition or disconnection. Practical courses in vocational

education struggle to effectively connect with theoretical courses in higher education, while continuing education training programs lack relevance to the curriculum systems of the former two types. Furthermore, teaching model coordination is insufficient. There is a lack of cross-institutional and cross-type collaborative teaching mechanisms, making it difficult to realize the complementary advantages of faculty resources and teaching methods across different institutions. For instance, in some integrated training programs, vocational colleges and universities maintain independent curriculum designs, leading to fragmented knowledge systems among students.

Fourth, the evaluation and supervision mechanisms are deficient, making it difficult to ensure collaborative benefits. First and foremost, the evaluation is dominated by a single entity. Currently, the collaborative evaluation of "Three Educations" is primarily conducted internally by the government, lacking participation from diverse stakeholders such as enterprises, society and students, resulting in less objective evaluation outcomes. In addition, the evaluation indicators are unreasonable. They predominantly focus on the quantity of collaborative activities, such as the number of cooperative projects and the volume of resource sharing, while neglecting the quality and benefits of collaboration, such as improvements in talent cultivation quality and contributions to social services. Moreover, the supervision mechanism is incomplete. There is a lack of dynamic monitoring during the implementation of collaborative projects, leading to some projects becoming mere formalities and failing to achieve the expected outcomes.

Finally, weak support mechanisms pose challenges to sustainable operation. On the one hand, the policy guarantee is not precise enough, the existing policy is mostly macro guidance, lack of specific rules for the construction of the coordination mechanism, such as the specific standards of credit mutual recognition and the property rights protection policy of resource sharing. On the other hand, the funding mechanism remains unitary, heavily reliant on government budgets while attracting minimal private sector participation, failing to meet long-term collaborative needs. In addition, technological support is inadequate, lacking advanced tools to facilitate resource integration, credit certification and teaching collaboration, resulting in low efficiency. Furthermore, the

absence of faculty collaboration mechanisms-particularly the lack of regular exchange programs, training initiatives and reciprocal appointments among three education systems-prevents the faculty team from meeting collaborative innovation demands.

#### **4. Construction of the Mechanism for Collaborative and Innovative Development of "Three Educations"**

##### **4.1 Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Governance Mechanism to Clarify the Boundaries of Rights and Responsibilities**

First, establishing a coordinated mechanism. The government will lead the formation of a "Three Educations" collaborative innovation steering committee, with members including heads of departments such as education, human resources and social security, development and reform, and industry and information technology, as well as representatives from vocational colleges, higher education institutions, continuing education organizations, enterprises and industry associations. The committee will oversee the strategic planning of collaborative development for "Three Educations", formulate supportive policies, address critical issues during implementation, and establish a regular decision-making framework featuring "annual plenary meetings and quarterly thematic sessions" to ensure systematic progress in collaborative efforts.

Second, clarifying the rights and responsibilities of multiple stakeholders. The coordinated development of diverse educational systems must champion distinct positioning and well-defined responsibilities<sup>[2]</sup>. During the collaborative advancement of "Three Educations", all stakeholders should clearly define their rights and obligations to ensure standardized collaborative activities. The government should lead policy formulation, resource allocation, macro-level supervision and interdepartmental coordination, while moderately reducing direct intervention in micro-level collaborative activities. Vocational colleges, universities and continuing education institutions, as core implementers, undertake specific tasks such as talent cultivation, curriculum development, resource construction and teaching collaboration, actively aligning with market and corporate demands. Enterprises

are responsible for providing practical positions, technical support and talent demand information, while deeply participating in the formulation of talent training programs and curriculum development. Industry associations are tasked

with establishing industry talent standards, participating in educational quality evaluation, releasing industry demands and promoting precise alignment between education and industrial needs, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. List of Rights and Responsibilities of Multiple Subjects during the Process of Collaborative and Innovative Development of “Three Educations”**

Main Body	Core Responsibilities	Core Rights
Government	Policy formulation, resource allocation, macro-level supervision, interdepartmental coordination	Supervise the effectiveness of collaboration, adjust resource allocation, commend outstanding entities
Vocational colleges/ Universities/Continuing education institutions	Talent cultivation, curriculum development, resource construction, teaching collaboration	Apply for special funds, share high-quality resources, participate in profit distribution
Enterprises	Provide practical positions, technical support and talent demand information, participate in the formulation of talent training programs and curriculum development	Preferentially recruit collaboratively trained talents, transform scientific research achievements, enjoy tax breaks
Industry Associations	Establish industry talent standards, participate in educational quality evaluation, release industry demands, promote alignment between education and industrial needs	Participate in policy formulation, supervise the collaborative process, obtain talent supply and demand data

Third, establishing a mechanism for shared benefits and risk-sharing. Develop a diversified benefit distribution system that allocates collaborative innovation outcomes-such as outcomes of talent cultivation and research commercialization gains-scientifically based on each party's resource contributions. For example, enterprises should receive fair compensation for talent supply, while universities should share research benefits from corporate R&D. Simultaneously, implement a risk-sharing framework to address potential issues like resource waste or failure to meet quality standards during collaboration. By clearly defining each party's risk-sharing ratio, this approach reduces individual burdens and enhances the incentive for cooperative engagement.

#### 4.2 Building a Resource Sharing and Integration Mechanism to Improve Allocation Efficiency

First, through digital and intelligent empowerment, establishing an integrated resource-sharing platform. Digital and intelligent empowerment serves as the key driver for advancing the collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations"<sup>[3]</sup>. Governments should develop comprehensive plans to leverage digital technologies, creating a cross-regional and cross-type collaborative

innovation resource-sharing platform for "Three Educations". This platform will optimize the allocation of educational resources and facilitate content aggregation<sup>[4]</sup>. It should incorporate functionalities such as resource retrieval, online learning, credit certification and faculty exchange, utilizing technologies like cloud computing and big data to achieve efficient integration and precise delivery of resources. It is essential to establish unified standards for resource development and access, specifying norms regarding content format, quality requirements and copyright ownership, ensuring interoperability across different types of resources.

Second, establishing a resource-sharing incentive and safeguard mechanism. Introduce incentive policies for resource sharing, offering financial subsidies and recognition awards to institutions and enterprises that proactively share high-quality resources. Incorporate resource-sharing performance into institutional evaluation systems to boost participation enthusiasm. Improve copyright protection mechanisms by clarifying ownership and usage rules during sharing, utilizing blockchain technology for copyright traceability and protection to safeguard providers' legitimate rights. Implement a dynamic resource update mechanism to promptly refresh content based on industry development and talent demand

changes, ensuring timeliness and relevance. Third, promoting collaborative development and sharing of high-quality educational resources. Encourage vocational colleges, universities and continuing education institutions to jointly develop premium course materials, including interdisciplinary core courses, practical training programs and professional development courses. They should also establish shared facilities such as training bases, research platforms and innovation hubs to optimize resource utilization. For instance, universities and vocational colleges could collaborate on virtual simulation training bases to provide hands-on learning opportunities for students. Continuing education providers and enterprises may co-create training programs to enhance workforce skills. Furthermore, efforts should be made to extend quality educational resources to underserved rural and remote areas, ensuring equitable distribution of educational resources.

#### **4.3 Establishing an Integrated Talent Co-cultivation Mechanism to Enhance Training Quality**

First, establishing a coordinated mechanism for talent development objectives. Based on industry demands and the concept of lifelong education, it is necessary to holistically plan the training objectives for the three key sectors: vocational education, higher education and continuing education. Vocational education focuses on cultivating technical professionals with foundational theoretical knowledge, higher education emphasizes developing innovative interdisciplinary talents, while continuing education aims to nurture lifelong learners with job-specific competencies. These three components form a talent development chain progressing from basic skills to innovation capabilities and lifelong enhancement. It is essential to establish a talent demand forecasting mechanism: by conducting enterprise surveys and industry analysis, market needs can be accurately identified, training objectives dynamically adjusted, and a high alignment between talent cultivation and market demands ensured.

Second, enhancing the curriculum system and credit recognition mechanism. To establish an integrated curriculum system featuring "vertical alignment and horizontal connectivity", vocational colleges, universities and continuing education institutions should collaboratively

develop course standards to prevent curriculum duplication and disconnection. The modular design of course content should incorporate elements such as vocational skills, academic knowledge and lifelong learning capabilities, enabling flexible integration across different educational types. The synergy among "Three Educations" relies on quantifying learning outcomes across educational categories, with credit transfer being the most effective and direct pathway<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, a unified credit bank system must be established to clearly define the recognition, accumulation and conversion rules for credits across different educational types, promoting mutual recognition of credits among "Three Educations". For example, practical training credits from vocational students can be converted into practical course credits at universities, while training credits from continuing education participants can be converted into academic degree credits.

Third, innovating collaborative teaching and training mechanisms. Implement cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary collaborative teaching models, where faculty from vocational colleges, universities and continuing education institutions form joint teaching teams to jointly deliver courses and project guidance. For instance, university professors handle theoretical instruction, vocational school teachers focus on practical training, and continuing education instructors provide lifelong learning support, creating a complementary teaching framework. Jointly establish shared training bases with corporate participation in construction and management, providing authentic industry projects and training equipment to achieve seamless integration of "teaching-practice-employment." Promote talent development models such as "order-based training" and "modern apprenticeships," enabling enterprises to deeply engage in the entire talent cultivation process and enhance job competency alignment.

#### **4.4 Establishing a Multi-Dimensional Collaborative Evaluation and Supervision Mechanism to Ensure Synergistic Benefits**

First, establishing a multi-stakeholder evaluation system. High-quality educational development hinges on building a robust evaluation framework as the cornerstone<sup>[6]</sup>. In the collaboration of "Three Educations", it is essential to clarify the evaluation responsibilities

of multiple stakeholders including governments, institutions, enterprises, society and students, thereby creating a comprehensive evaluation ecosystem. Governments conduct macro-level assessments of the overall effectiveness of the collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations"; institutions perform self-evaluations of internal collaborative teaching and resource sharing; enterprises evaluate the alignment between talent cultivation quality and job market demands; social organizations provide third-party evaluations with objective and impartial reports; students assess teaching quality and learning outcomes. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures the comprehensiveness and objectivity of evaluation results.

Second, refining the evaluation framework. To achieve the core objectives of collaborative and

innovative development, it is essential to establish a scientifically structured evaluation system encompassing key dimensions such as collaborative mechanism development, resource-sharing efficiency, talent cultivation quality, societal service contributions and industry alignment. The framework should balance quantitative and qualitative metrics while emphasizing quality-oriented indicators, including employment rates, salary levels, corporate satisfaction and commercialization rates of research outcomes, as shown in Table 2. Tailor evaluation criteria to different educational types: vocational education should prioritize skill assessment, higher education should emphasize innovation capabilities, and continuing education should focus on skill enhancement.

**Table 2. The Evaluation Index System for the Collaborative and Innovative Development of "Three Educations"**

First-level Indicator	Second-level Indicator	Indicator Type
Construction of collaborative mechanisms	The perfection degree of the list of rights and responsibilities, the effectiveness of the decision-making mechanism, the rationality of the distribution of interests	Qualitative+ Quantitative
Efficiency of resource sharing	Quantity of shared resources, resource utilization rate, platform activity	Quantitative
Quality of talent cultivation	Employment rate, salary level, company satisfaction, skill certificate acquisition rate	Quantitative
Contribution to social services	Number of training participants, conversion rate of scientific research achievements, resource radiation degree in underdeveloped regions	Quantitative
Degree of industrial docking	Depth of enterprise participation, adaptability of curriculum to industry, income from technical services	Qualitative+ Quantitative

Third, establishing a dynamic supervision and feedback mechanism. Develop a "process monitoring and outcome evaluation" system to oversee collaborative projects through regular inspections, random checks and online monitoring, enabling timely identification and resolution of issues. Implement an evaluation feedback mechanism to promptly share assessment results with all stakeholders, serving as key references for policy adjustments, resource allocation and performance incentives. Recognize and reward entities demonstrating outstanding collaboration, while conducting rectification talks with those exhibiting poor performance or superficial engagement, ensuring the mechanism operates effectively.

#### 4.5 Establishing a Comprehensive Safeguard Mechanism to Ensure Long-Term Operation

First, strengthening policy support mechanisms. Modern education development relies heavily on

legal safeguards and policy support. The fundamental operational frameworks and requirements for all levels and types of education are regulated by laws and regulations, and their advancement depends on government policy support<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, the primary task in promoting the collaborative and innovative development among "Three Educations" is to issue specialized policy documents that clearly outline specific tasks, implementation steps and safeguard measures for establishing a coordinated mechanism. This will facilitate the integrated development of vocational education, higher education and continuing education. Simultaneously, relevant laws and regulations should be refined to explicitly address key aspects such as credit transfer, resource sharing, intellectual property protection and faculty mobility, thereby providing a legal foundation for the collaborative mechanism. Additionally, it is essential to enhance policy coordination

among departments such as education, human resources, and development and reform to ensure policy alignment and synergy, avoid conflicts, and establish an evaluation mechanism for policy implementation effectiveness. This will enable timely adjustments and optimizations to improve policy relevance and practical outcomes.

Second, enhancing the financial support mechanism. Establish a robust and diversified funding framework by significantly increasing government fiscal allocations and creating a dedicated fund specifically for the collaborative and innovative development of "Three Educations." This fund will directly support enhanced resource-sharing platforms, targeted curriculum development, and comprehensive faculty training. Encourage private sector participation through government procurement of services, university-industry partnerships and social donations, thereby engaging enterprises and social organizations in this collaborative innovation initiative. Enhance fund management by establishing rigorous oversight of the special fund's usage to guarantee efficient allocation for specifically designated purposes. Introduce a performance-linked funding mechanism that adjusts investment amounts based on collaborative outcomes, thereby improving fund utilization efficiency.

Third, enhancing the technical support mechanism. Strengthen R&D and application of technologies, encouraging collaboration among enterprises, universities and research institutions to tackle technological challenges in the collaboration of "Three Educations". This includes resource integration, credit certification and online teaching technologies to elevate the intelligent level of collaborative mechanisms. Establish a technical support service system to provide comprehensive services such as technical consultation, platform maintenance and resource development for institutions and enterprises. Strengthen data security and privacy protection by improving data security management systems and employing encryption and desensitization technologies to ensure the safety and privacy of collaborative platform data.

Finally, strengthening faculty collaboration mechanisms. Establish a tripartite faculty exchange and training framework, with government-led planning to conduct cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary training

programs, thereby enhancing teachers' collaborative teaching and resource development capabilities. Implement a faculty rotation system allowing vocational schools, universities and continuing education institutions to mutually appoint adjunct faculty, while inviting corporate technical experts to serve as part-time instructors. This enables academic staff to gain industry experience through corporate internships, improving their practical skills and industry awareness. Refine faculty incentive mechanisms by incorporating participation in collaborative teaching and curriculum development into professional title evaluations and performance assessments, thereby motivating faculty to actively engage in collaborative efforts.

## **5. Conclusion**

The establishment of the mechanism for collaborative and innovative development of vocational education, higher education and continuing education represents a pivotal mission and inevitable choice for advancing modern educational governance and refining lifelong education systems in the new era. Deepening the synergy among these three educational sectors not only addresses critical challenges such as fragmented systems, dispersed resources, and misalignment between talent cultivation and industrial demands, but also creates seamless pathways for lifelong learning. This initiative provides versatile, skilled professionals to drive industrial transformation and delivers robust human capital support for high-quality socioeconomic development. However, implementing and refining such mechanisms requires sustained efforts from multiple stakeholders including governments, educational institutions, continuing education providers, enterprises and the society. Governments must refine policy details and enhance interdepartmental coordination; educational institutions should break down disciplinary barriers and deepen curriculum integration; enterprises need to actively participate in the entire talent development chain by contributing industry resources; the society must foster collaborative innovation ecosystems with active evaluation and oversight. As digital technologies increasingly integrate with education, the integration of the three sectors via such synergy is poised to achieve more precise resource allocation, efficient teaching collaboration, and

scientific evaluation feedback through smart education platforms, elevating lifelong education systems to new heights. With concerted efforts from all parties, this collaborative and innovative mechanism will mature, playing a vital role in building a learning society and realizing the goal of becoming an education powerhouse.

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