Ministry of SMEs and Startups

Press Release
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New Pathways for International Students to Join Regional SMEs

The Ministry of SMEs and Startups (MSS) has announced a new nationwide initiative designed to connect international students studying in Korea with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) facing growing talent shortages – particularly outside the capital region.

On Friday, the MSS launched an open call for universities and training institutions to participate in two programs that aim to translate global talent into local economic impact.

At the heart of the initiative is the Global Talent Employment Pioneer University scheme, which support universities that offer career-focused training, internships and on-site placements tailored to international students. The program is designed to help students transition from campus to the workplace while enabling SMEs to access globally minded talent already familiar with Korea's business environment.

Complementing this is the K-Export Vanguard Academy, a specialized training track that prepares international students for export-oriented roles in Korean SMEs. Drawing on students' language skills and regional expertise, the academy delivers practical instruction in trade operations and overseas marketing, before matching graduates with export-ready firms. One operating institution will be selected to run region-based training program nationwide.

The initiative reflects a broader shift in Korea's labor and industrial strategy: addressing workforce gaps in SMEs while strengthening the country's export competitiveness through people who can navigate international markets with cultural fluency.

Applications for both programs will be accepted online from 30 January to 20 February via K-Work Platform, Korea's dedicated employment-matching portal for international students. Full program details are available on the MSS website and the Korea SMEs and Startups Agency portal.

Alongside the employment programs, MSS also opened applications for visa recommendation support linked to SME hiring. This includes recommendations for the E-7-1 professional visa for skilled international graduates, as well as pathways to upgrade certain non-professional visas to skilled-worker status for long-term employment.

To reduce administrative burdens on businesses, required documentation has been streamlined this year, with the number of submission items cut significantly. The range of occupations eligible for MSS visa recommendations has also expanded, adding roles such as overseas sales, product planning and market research – further widening opportunities for international graduates seeking careers in Korean SMEs.

Details on visa recommendation support are available from 30 January through MSS and related agency websites, with rolling applications accepted via the K-Work platform.

For more news and updates on Korea's SME and startup policies, follow the Ministry's official **LinkedIn** page:
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