

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Policy Initiatives of the Education and Manpower Bureau on Manpower Training and Development

Introduction

The 2004 Policy Agenda lists the Government's new and on-going initiatives over the next three and a half years. This note elaborates on the initiative on manpower training and development that concerns the Education and Manpower Bureau. It also gives an account of the key policy initiatives of the Bureau on manpower training and development in the coming year.

On-going initiative in the 2003 and 2004 Policy Agenda

Enlightened People with a Rich Culture

We are setting up a Qualifications Framework and the associated quality assurance mechanism.

2. Last year, the Government conducted a public consultation exercise on the establishment of a Qualifications Framework (QF) and its associated Quality Assurance Mechanism for Hong Kong. The QF will provide objective benchmarks for quality assurance of different levels of qualifications, thus giving clear information on the standard of courses and providers. It also enables clear progression pathways to be mapped out, so as to give learners a sense of direction in lifelong learning. Through their active participation in setting the standards of qualifications, industry can ensure that the outcomes of various education and training programmes will meet their needs.

3. The feedback collected from the public consultation suggests that the public is generally in support of the proposed setting up of a QF. To test the applicability of the proposed QF in different industry settings and

to examine the feasibility of developing Industry Training Specifications (ITSs) for Hong Kong, we carried out pilot studies in six industry sectors, namely Accountancy, Chinese Catering, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Information Technology, Retail and Watch & Clock. Key stakeholders, including employers, employees, relevant professional bodies, education and training providers as well as accreditation body were actively engaged in the pilot studies. The findings of these studies confirm that the proposed QF can be applied to different industry settings and that it is feasible to develop ITSs for Hong Kong.

4. The Manpower Development Committee has therefore recommended that a QF to be supported by an associated quality assurance mechanism should be introduced for Hong Kong. In the coming year, our key areas of work include the following.

(A) Solicit support from stakeholders

5. Stakeholders' support is pivotal to ensure wide recognition of the QF and the qualifications it encompasses. We shall reach out to stakeholders to promote the benefits of the QF and solicit their active support and participation in the development process.

(B) Set up Industry Training Advisory Committees in selected industries

6. To implement QF for the vocational sector, the setting up of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) will be paramount. We intend to adopt a phased approach for the formation of ITACs and start out with industry sectors which show interest and readiness to participate in the exercise. Major stakeholders, including employers, employees and professional bodies, should be represented on the ITACs.

(C) Develop Industry Training Specifications

7. The ITACs should be responsible for, among other things, the development of ITSs. The ITSs specify the competency standards required of different levels of qualifications in an industry and set out the assessment guidelines. With an ITS in place, training providers can design various courses and learning pathways leading to the achievement

of specified competency standards and recognised qualifications to suit the needs of different learners. We shall work with the ITACs and provide assistance in the development of ITSs. To maintain its currency, the ITS should be updated regularly to keep abreast of the latest industry requirements.

8. The development of ITSs and assessment guidelines should provide the basis for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in various industry sectors. This is a mechanism to recognise the skills, knowledge and relevant experience of skilled workers. The ITAC should advise on the formulation of appropriate RPL arrangement for respective industry sectors.

(D) Establish an associated quality assurance mechanism

9. To underpin the implementation of the QF, we need a quality assurance mechanism to ensure credibility of qualifications awarded by a wide range of education and training providers. In view of its experience in quality assurance and its independent status as a statutory body, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) is best placed to take on this role.

10. However, in order to discharge its functions under the QF, the scope of HKCAA has to be expanded so as to meet the needs of a much wider clientele and a more diverse range of courses. To this end, HKCAA conducted a self-review in conjunction with an external consultant last year to evaluate its current practices and performance, and to assess its readiness for the expanded role under the QF.

11. HKCAA is deliberating on the proposed changes to its accreditation criteria, procedures, composition of the Council, operating and funding models in preparation for the expanded role arising from the self-review. The Council will present the outcome of its deliberation to the Government in due course.

12. The development of the QF and the associated quality assurance mechanism is a long-term commitment and will take years to come to fruition. We shall continue to collaborate with the major stakeholders in

the coming years to ensure the success of the QF, which will help enhance the capability and competitiveness of our human resources in the global economy.

Continuing Education Fund

13. In June 2002, we launched the \$5 billion Continuing Education Fund (CEF) to assist our workforce to pursue continuing education and training programmes so as to prepare them for the knowledge-based economy. Eligible applicants may enrol in approved courses in specific sectors (namely logistics, financial services, China business, tourism, language, design, and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the workplace) and upon successful completion of these courses, they will be reimbursed 80 per cent of the course fees up to \$10,000.

14. In September 2003, we relaxed the eligibility criteria of the CEF to cover degree holders. As at 15 December 2003, there were about 2 000 approved courses and over 62 800 approved applicants under the CEF. Given the \$10,000 entitlement per applicant, the total amount of fund committed is approximately \$628 million.

15. To make full use of the Fund to meet the manpower requirement of the industry, we have expanded the coverage of the CEF to include additional sectors/domains. Upon consultation with prominent economists and academics, we introduced a new sector “Creative Industries” in early 2004 to cover courses in advertising, digital entertainment, films, television and video. The existing “China Business” sector has also been expanded and renamed as “Business Services” to include business management training under the Fund. Courses in French, German and Japanese are also included in the skill domain “Language”. We expect that new courses under these sectors/domains will be available for application by the second quarter of 2004.

16. We shall review the coverage of the CEF from time to time with a view to providing suitable courses to meet the manpower requirement of the industry.

Skills Upgrading Scheme

17. In response to the ongoing restructuring of our economy, we launched the \$400 million Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS) in September 2001 to provide focused skills training for in-service workers with lower education attainment to enhance their skills and competitiveness in the labour market. Since its inception a total of about 3 100 classes in seventeen industries benefiting more than 67 000 workers has been organised under the Scheme. As at 15 December 2003, \$194 million has been committed under the Scheme.

18. In early 2004, we shall launch a series of publicity campaign to enhance the public awareness of the Scheme and to further promote the SUS among both workers and employers. These include an opening ceremony, TV and radio programmes, and advertisements on the major public transport. We shall also continue to invite suitable industry sectors to join the Scheme. At present, both the “Sports & Leisure” and “TV, Film & Entertainment” industries have submitted their proposals for joining the SUS while negotiation is under way for the “Gardening and Horticulture” and “Civil Aviation” industries to participate in the Scheme.

Employees Retraining

19. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) was established in 1992 to provide retraining to eligible employees with a view to helping them cope with changes in economic environment and enhance their employability. In 2004-05 ERB plans to provide more than 110 000 training places and to retain the placement target of 70%.

20. To enhance recognition of the skills of its retrainees, the ERB set up a Practical Skills Training and Assessment Centre in October 2002 to assess the skills of domestic helper retrainees through common assessment. Those who have passed the assessment tests were issued competency cards. In 2004-05, the ERB will develop and conduct common assessments for retrainees of more programmes such as personal care workers and property attendants.

21. A levy on employers of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) has been introduced since 1 October 2003. The levy will provide a stable source of income for retraining services. With additional resources, we aim to increase the number of retraining places and expand the scope of retraining services to cover more unemployed people. The timing for introducing the reform will be dependent on the outcome of a Judicial Review initiated by a number of FDHs challenging the legitimacy of the proposed levy.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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