

LegCo Panel on Manpower

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

Introduction

This note elaborates on the initiative on manpower training and development in the 2005 Policy Agenda that concerns the Education and Manpower Bureau. It also gives an account of the key policy initiatives of the Bureau in the coming year.

2005 Policy Agenda

Enlightened People with a Rich Culture

On-going Initiative in the 2005 Policy Agenda - Establishment of a Qualifications Framework

2. The Chief Executive announced in the Policy Address 2004 the establishment of a qualifications framework (QF) to provide learners with a clear articulation ladder. In February 2004, the Executive Council endorsed the establishment of a seven-level cross-sectoral QF and its associated quality assurance mechanism.

3. The QF is a hierarchy that orders and supports qualifications of academic, vocational and continuing education. All qualifications to be linked to the QF will have to be quality assured. The QF is not a mandatory system but it enables progression pathways to be mapped out for individuals to pursue lifelong learning. In the long run, the establishment of the QF should enhance the capability and competitiveness of our workforce.

4. To ensure the relevance of qualifications and related training in the vocational sector, the Education and Manpower Bureau is setting up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) to develop competency-based qualifications for the industries. So far, ITACs have been formed in six industries, namely, Printing and Publishing, Watch and Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, and Electrical & Mechanical Services. We shall continue to reach out to employers, employees, professional bodies and other stakeholders to promote the QF.

5. The first four ITACs have started to develop their Industry Training Specifications (ITSs) specifying the competency standards required of different levels of qualifications under the QF. We are also working with these ITACs in formulating an appropriate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism for their respective industries. The RPL mechanism is developed on the basis of the ITSs to recognise the skills, knowledge and relevant experience of workers, so that when they pursue further training to acquire higher qualifications, they do not need to start from scratch. We shall assist the ITACs in consulting within their industries the draft specifications and the proposed RPL mechanism, so that the final products will gain recognition within the industries. In addition, we intend to conduct a study this year to develop a credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system to complement the QF. This will in the long run help provide flexibility in learning that suits individual circumstances and minimise duplication in training.

6. We intend to establish in 2005 a Qualifications Register (QR), which is a web-based database of information on qualifications, courses and institutions that are recognised under the QF. The Register will provide a centralized source of information for learners, employers, professions, education and training institutions, as well as the local and international

communities. We have entrusted the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) to administer the QR on our behalf. We are working with HKCAA on the design of the database, and the proposed mechanism for registration of qualifications onto the QR.

7. To ensure the credibility of qualifications awarded by a wide range of education and training providers under the QF, we have tasked the HKCAA with the responsibility of assuring the quality of qualifications recognised under the QF, other than those awarded by the self-accrediting universities and their continuing education arms. To this end, the HKCAA is taking steps to reform its operating and financing models, as well as its accreditation criteria and procedures to prepare for its new responsibilities under the QF.

8. To empower the HKCAA to perform the quality assurance role under the QF, we need to expand the HKCAA's scope of work and legislative amendments to the HKCAA Ordinance (Cap. 1150) will be required. We shall introduce an amendment bill into the Legislative Council for this purpose within this year.

9. As regards the quality assurance of sub-degree programmes, while the UGC-funded ones will continue to be monitored by the UGC, the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) has proposed that the self-financing ones should be looked after by a new auditing body called the Joint Quality Review Committee. It is proposed that this Committee will review the quality assurance process for all the self-financing sub-degree programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions; and conduct assessments for these programmes with a view to classifying them under the QF. We shall work with the HUCOM Working Group on the details of the proposal and its implementation.

Key Policy Initiatives

Further Funding for Project Yi Jin

10. Project Yi Jin (PYJ) was launched in October 2000 as a bridging programme to provide an alternative route and to expand the continuing education opportunities for secondary school leavers and adult learners. The programme consists of a total of 600 contact hours, including 420 contact hours for core modules and 180 contact hours for electives. The core modules comprise Chinese, English, Putonghua, Mathematics, Information Technology and Communication Skills whereas the electives include a wide variety of practical subjects to prepare students for further education and employment. The programme is run by member institutions of the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (FCE) on a self-financing basis.

11. A tracking survey on the graduates of the first three academic years was conducted in early 2004 to evaluate the effectiveness of the PYJ. It shows that PYJ has performed an effective role as a bridging programme and has fulfilled its purpose of providing an alternative educational pathway and expanding the continuing education opportunities for low achievers in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). Given the success of PYJ and its wide acceptance by students and parents, we are seeking the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council to continue our funding support for students admitted to the Programme for at least three academic years, i.e. up to the 2007/08 academic year and beyond. The long term future of PYJ will be reviewed in the light of the proposed reform of the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education.

Yi Jin/Secondary Schools Collaboration Project

12. To provide an additional progression pathway for Secondary 5 students who do not wish to sit for the HKCEE, we have introduced, as a pilot scheme, the Yi Jin/Secondary Schools Collaboration Project in ten secondary schools in the 2004/05 academic year. Each secondary school pairs up with one of the FCE member institutions and they work in partnership. FCE members are responsible for teaching three of the ten PYJ subjects at their own campuses. The remaining seven subjects are taught in the participating secondary schools should the teachers meet the minimum appointment criteria¹ for the teaching staff of the existing PYJ. Apart from teaching, the FCE member supports the secondary school in quality assurance, general administration and student support aspects.

13. We shall conduct an evaluation study of the pilot scheme to assess the effectiveness of the scheme before deciding whether to continue, or extend, the pilot scheme in future.

Continuing Education Fund

14. We launched the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) in June 2002 to better prepare our workforce for the knowledge-based economy and to enhance Hong Kong's overall competitiveness. Eligible applicants who enrolled in approved courses in eight specific sectors and have successfully completed them will be reimbursed 80 per cent of the course fees up to \$10,000.

15. Upon relaxation of the eligibility criteria to allow degree holders to

¹ An honours degree or equivalent in the relevant area and with relevant professional qualification plus at least two years of working experience.

be registered under the CEF in September 2003, we have seen the number of applicants steadily growing from 63 000 at December 2003 to over 160 000 by the end of 2004. This shows a marked increase in the popularity of the CEF. On the other hand, applicants also have a greater variety of courses to choose from during the year as the number of approved courses has increased from 2 000 at the beginning of the year to over 3 700 towards the end. We anticipate that more courses will be added onto our list of approved courses in 2005 to allow more choices for our applicants.

16. Separately, we have engaged an independent consultant to review the effectiveness as well as the coverage of the CEF. The review will be completed within 2005 and we shall take into account its outcome in determining how best to refine the operation and the coverage of the Fund.

Skills Upgrading Scheme

17. 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. Up to December 2004, the Scheme has offered about 5 200 courses in 20 industries benefiting more than 107 000 workers. Since its inception, the Scheme has committed about \$228 million and we anticipate that the remaining balance will be sufficient for the Scheme to run for at least another two years.

18. The Scheme has been widely supported by both employers and employees. An independent survey completed in August 2004 shows that over 90% of the SUS trainees considered the Scheme had improved their vocational skills and enhanced their self-confidence. For the employers, more than 80%

thought that the SUS courses were effective, and they would continue to sponsor their employees to participate in the Scheme. We will continue to include more industries under the Scheme to benefit more workers. The two industries that are being considered for admission to the Scheme in 2005 are Medical and Health and Clocks, Watches and Jewelry.

Training for Non-engaged Youth

19. We set up last year a Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth (Task Force) to co-ordinate and oversee the various training and employment programmes targeted at non-engaged youth. \$50 million was earmarked for the Task Force to pilot suitable training programmes for non-engaged youth, to provide train-the-trainer programmes for youth workers and commissioning relevant research studies.

20. The Task Force has identified a number of areas in which there may be opportunities to further develop pilot projects and services for the non-engaged youth. These areas are as follows –

- a) programmes that aim to motivate non-engaged youth to seek self-improvement and work;
- b) modern apprenticeship schemes;
- c) sports-related training;
- d) training for creative and cultural industries; and
- e) training and employment programmes in the Mainland of China.

21. To date, the Task Force has approved 11 pilot projects with a total cost of \$19 million. Over 3 700 training places would be provided under these projects. Many more proposals have been submitted and are being examined.

22. The Task Force aims to complete its work by early 2006 and to make appropriate recommendations on continuing development of youth to the Government.

Employees Retraining

23. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) will continue to provide more than 110 000 training places in 2005 to help eligible employees to cope with changes in economic environment and enhance their employability.

24. The ERB will develop more new retraining courses with potential for employment opportunities, including massage and foot reflexology. It will also offer more “top-up” skill training modules, such as cookery, baby-sitting, child care and elderly care to local domestic helper retrainees to enhance their employability. The ERB will also strengthen its quality assurance process in order to facilitate the integration of its courses and modules into the QF.

25. A levy on employers of foreign domestic helpers was introduced on 1 October 2003 but the levy was challenged by a Judicial Review. The High Court has dismissed the case on 4 January 2005 but the plaintiff is likely to lodge an appeal. The levy income would provide us a stable source of income for retraining and enable us to expand the coverage of retraining to benefit more people. While awaiting the settlement of the judicial case, we are working on how to make use of the extra funding, if available, to expand the work of training and retraining to benefit more people.

Education and Manpower Bureau

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