

LegCo Panel on Manpower

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

This note elaborates on the initiatives on manpower development and training in the 2005-06 Policy Agenda, setting out the key policy initiatives of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in the coming year.

2005-06 Policy Agenda

Enlightened People with a Rich Culture

On-going Initiative in the 2005-06 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. The QF is a hierarchy that orders and supports qualifications of academic, vocational and continuing education. All qualifications to be recognized under the QF will have to be quality assured. With the introduction of the QF, more diverse education and training pathways will be created. It will facilitate articulation of qualifications and foster an environment that is conducive to lifelong learning. Nonetheless, the QF is not a mandatory system and the qualifications under the QF are not 'licences' for employment.

3. To ensure the relevance of qualifications and related training in the vocational sector, we are setting up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), among other things, to develop Specifications for Competency Standards (SCSs) (previously known as Industry Training Specifications (ITSs)) under the QF. They will become the basis for curriculum design of related training courses. So far, ITACs have been formed for eight industries, namely, Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, and Information & Communications Technology. We shall continue to reach out to employers, employees, professional bodies and other stakeholders in other industries to promote the formation of ITACs.

4. In our experience, it takes about a year for an ITAC to develop its

SCS after rounds of consultation within the industry. When the SCS is close to completion, we shall assist the ITAC to formulate an appropriate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism for the industry. RPL will enhance workers' opportunities for further education and training. It will also ensure that they do not need to start from scratch or to repeat training.

5. In devising the RPL mechanism, our emphasis is on "recognition", rather than on "exemption". This is based on our belief that the skills and knowledge that the worker possesses have been acquired through previous learning and/or working experience, and hence the RPL is there to recognize these attributes, rather than giving an exemption as if such skills and knowledge were not possessed by the worker in the first place. The SCS will be the basic and necessary reference for the RPL process.

6. To ensure the credibility of qualifications awarded by a wide range of education and training providers under the QF, we need to develop a mechanism of academic and vocational accreditation to assure the quality of these qualifications. To this end, we introduced the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill (the Bill) into the Legislative Council on 6 July 2005. A Bills Committee has been set up to scrutinize the Bill.

7. Under the Bill, we have specified the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority. The HKCAA is tasked with the responsibility of assuring the quality of qualifications recognised under the QF. As the QR Authority, the HKCAA is required to administer the QR, which is a web-based database on qualifications, learning programmes and providers that are recognised under the QF. The Register will provide a centralized source of information for reference by the general public including learners, employers, providers, as well as the local and international communities. Subject to the enactment of the Bill, the QR will acquire a statutory status and become the public face of the QF.

8. In the past few months, we have been liaising with the self-accrediting institutions on the procedures for uploading their qualifications onto the QR. We have also commissioned the HKCAA to conduct pilot studies on registration of courses offered by the Employees Retraining Board, the Skills Upgrading Scheme, and the Continuing Education Fund onto the QR. It is our intention to introduce the QR prototype before the end of this year to demonstrate to the public how the QR will work.

9. As the UGC-funded institutions are playing an increasingly active role in the provision of self-financing sub-degree programmes, they have

formed a new body, known as the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC), to oversee the quality of such programmes and to assess these programmes for classification onto the QR. There will be cross-membership between the JQRC and the HKCAA to facilitate communication and the benchmarking of standards.

Key Policy Initiatives

Continuing Education Fund

10. 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. Over the years, we have seen a marked increase in the number of applicants growing steadily from 63,000 at December 2003 to over 230,000 at the end of September 2005. The number of approved courses increased from 2,000 at the end of 2003 to over 4,400 as at end of September 2005. Separately, we have engaged an independent consultant to review the effectiveness and the coverage of the CEF. The review will be completed by the end of 2005. We shall take into account its outcome in determining how best to refine the operation and the coverage of the Fund.

Skills Upgrading Scheme

11. To tackle the problem of manpower mismatch triggered by the ongoing economic restructuring, we launched a \$400 million Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS) in September 2001 to provide focused skills training for in-service workers with lower education attainment, so as to enhance their skills and competitiveness in the labour market. Twenty-three industries have been admitted to the Scheme so far. Since inception, the Scheme has offered about 6 350 classes benefiting more than 131 000 workers. As at end of September 2005, about \$273 million has been committed.

12. The Scheme has gained extensive support from both the employers and the employees. To measure its effectiveness, we have commissioned an independent consultant to conduct an evaluation survey of the Scheme. Interim results released in August 2005 showed that 92% of the trainees thought that the SUS could enhance their vocational skills and self-confidence. The Scheme is also very effective from the employers' perspective, as 87% of them considered the Scheme has increased their employees' devotion to the job.

Employees Retraining

13. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) will continue to provide over 100,000 training places in 2006 to help eligible employees, especially the unemployed, to cope with changes in the economic environment and enhance their re-employability.

14. The ERB will continue to develop new courses by tapping markets with employment potential, such as massage and foot reflexology, hotel housekeeping and cleaning etc. In response to market needs, the ERB will also offer separate training modules on post-natal care, child care and elderly care, in addition to the related training for local domestic helpers. By multi-skilling the retrainees, their employment prospect should be improved.

Further Funding for Project Yi Jin

15. Project Yi Jin (PYJ) was launched in October 2000 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. A student who has successfully completed the programme will be awarded a certificate, which is comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) for continuing education and employment purposes. Since the introduction of the PYJ in 2000/01 academic year, over 20,000 students have benefited from the programme. About 5,000 students have enrolled for the 2005/06 academic year.

16. The PYJ has fulfilled its purpose of providing an alternative educational pathway and expanding the continuing education opportunities for the low achievers in the HKCEE. Given the success of the PYJ and its wide acceptance by students and parents, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved our request in January 2005 to continue funding support for students admitted to the programme up to the 2007/08 academic year and beyond. In the light of the reform of the academic structure for senior secondary education with effect from September 2009, we shall review the long-term future of the PYJ and its repositioning.

Yi Jin/Secondary Schools Collaboration Project

17. To provide an additional progression pathway for Secondary 5 students who do not wish to sit for the HKCEE, we introduced, as a pilot scheme, the Yi Jin/Secondary Schools Collaboration Project (YJ/SSCP) in ten secondary schools with 17 classes in the 2004/05 academic year. The pilot YJ/SSCP adopts the same curriculum as the PYJ. Each secondary school pairs up with one of the FCE member institutions and they work in partnership. The HKCAA has confirmed that the exit standard of the students is comparable to

that of the PYJ offered to Secondary 5 school leavers. This means graduates of the YJ/SSCP are considered to have reached an academic level comparable, in totality, to five passes in the HKCEE for further studies and employment purpose.

18. On the other hand, we are conducting an evaluation study of the pilot scheme. The interim findings indicate that the pilot scheme is working reasonably well. The students have regained their confidence in school work and are willing to put in more efforts in their studies. They have also improved communication and relations with their parents. Both the students and parents find the pilot scheme useful and recommendable. The pilot scheme has been extended to 18 secondary schools with 29 classes in the 2005/06 academic year. The evaluation study, including a tracking survey of the graduates, will be completed before the end of this year. We shall take it into account in our review on the long-term development of the pilot scheme under the new academic structure for senior secondary education.

Training for Non-engaged Youth

19. Recognising the increasing training and employment needs for the non-engaged youth, we set up a Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth (Task Force) in March 2004 and earmarked \$50 million for the Task Force to pilot suitable training programmes for non-engaged youth, to provide train-the-trainer programmes for youth workers and commission 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 –

- (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 China.

21. To date, of the 16 pilot projects approved by the Task Force, 12 have begun implementation which commit a total of over \$19 million and offer over 4 500 training places. Other proposals have been submitted and are being examined. On train-the-trainers programmes, the Task Force, through the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, has offered nearly 30 courses with over 1 200 participants.

Training for youth with disadvantaged background

22. As a concerted effort to address the problem of intergenerational poverty, we shall strengthen our vocational training services for youth with disadvantaged background. This will include the provision of additional training places in the Vocational Training Council for youth in certain relatively deprived districts (e.g. Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai) and those of ethnic minority origin.

Collaboration with the whole community

23. The Government has always accorded a high priority to education and manpower development. While we shall continue to invest heavily in education and manpower development initiatives, we need to count on the entire community to contribute to the development of our human capital to secure the future success of Hong Kong.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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