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Panel on Education

Meeting on 9 November 2015

Background brief on issues related to the promotion of vocational education

Purpose

This paper provides a summary of the major views and concerns expressed by Members on the promotion of vocational education in Hong Kong.

Background

Overview

2. According to the Administration, it is committed to providing quality, flexible and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points for secondary school leavers. It has highlighted the pivotal role of vocational education in broadening the learning opportunities for school leavers and in-service personnel as well as nurturing the requisite human capital in support of Hong Kong's development. In gist, the existing vocational education system is underpinned by the arrangements as described in the ensuing paragraphs.

Qualifications Framework

3. The Government launched the Qualifications Framework ("QF") in May 2008 with the objective of promoting lifelong learning and enhancing the competitiveness of the local workforce. QF is a seven-level hierarchy that orders and supports different qualifications, thereby facilitating articulation among academic, vocational and continuing education by providing a comprehensive network of learning pathways. Under QF, Specification of Competency Standards are drawn up by 20 Industry Training Advisory Committees, which set out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required

of employees in different functional areas of the respective sectors, and provide a basis for course providers to design training courses.

Vocational education at senior secondary level

4. At the senior secondary level, career-related and vocational education is implemented through the Applied Learning ("ApL") courses and the career-related experiences embedded in the Other Learning Experiences activities. In the 2013-2014 school year, around 320 secondary schools offered 37 ApL courses in six different areas¹ for about 10 000 Secondary ("S") 5 and 6 students. ApL courses have stronger elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields. Attainment in ApL subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination is recognized for admission to post-secondary programmes. In the 2014 HKDSE Examination, over 4 330 candidates had registered in ApL subjects.

Vocational education at post-secondary level

5. At the sub-degree level (QF Level 4), 259 of the approximately 400 full-time sub-degree programmes offered in the 2013-2014 academic year are Higher Diploma ("HD") programmes, which seek to enable students to acquire the appropriate attitude, knowledge and skills to support their initial employment at the para-professional level. At least 60% of the HD programme curriculum comprises contents in specific disciplines, professions or vocational skills.

6. At the undergraduate level (QF Level 5), some higher education institutions offer degree programmes with strong professional/vocational element. Articulation opportunities to senior year places of University Grants Committee-funded undergraduate programmes and top-up degree programmes in the self-financing sector are provided to eligible sub-degree graduates.

Statutory bodies

7. The Vocational Training Council ("VTC") is the major vocational education and training ("VET") provider in Hong Kong offering a wide range of full-time and part-time vocational education and training programmes leading to formal qualifications from post-S3 to degree levels (i.e. QF Levels 2 to 5) with multiple entry and exit points and articulation pathways. VTC has 13 member institutions which provide different progression pathways for career advancement and lifelong learning.

¹ The six areas are Creative Studies; Media and Communication; Business, Management and Law; Services; Applied Science; and Engineering and Production.

8. Apart from VTC, the Construction Industry Council, the Clothing Industry Training Authority and the Employees Retraining Board are also involved in the provision of VET.

Latest initiatives

9. In his 2014 Policy Address, the Chief Executive highlighted that mainstream education is not a straightjacket that fits all young people as everyone has his or her own interests and abilities. The Government should re-establish the positioning of vocational education in the education system. A series of measures were also announced to strengthen vocational education. Some major initiatives include –

(a) *Pilot Training and Support Scheme ("the Pilot Scheme")*

With the approval of the Finance Committee ("FC") in July 2014 for a commitment of \$144 million, VTC has started to implement the Pilot Scheme which aims to integrate structured apprenticeship training programmes and clear career progression pathways to attract and retain talent for specific industries with a keen demand for labour. It was estimated that the Pilot Scheme would benefit 2 000 students in total for two cohorts of intakes admitted to VTC's training programmes for specific industries in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years, targeting Secondary 3 to Secondary 6 school leavers and eligible adult learners. A review will be conducted on the Pilot Scheme very shortly to explore whether its duration should be extended or its scope expanded to cover other industries.

(b) *Industrial attachment*

Starting from the 2014-2015 academic year, the Government has allocated recurrent funding of about \$18 million to VTC to provide industrial attachment opportunities for about 9 000 students mainly studying HD programmes and certain Diploma in Vocational Education programmes.

(c) *Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education ("the Task Force")*

The Task Force was set up in June 2014 with a view to mapping out a strategy to promote vocational education and raise public awareness and recognition towards vocational education. Its members are drawn from a mix of expertise and backgrounds. The Task Force completed its work and submitted a report to the Secretary for Education in July 2015.

(d) *Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors ("SSSDP")*

With the approval of FC for a commitment of some \$960 million, the Government will, starting from the 2015-2016 academic year, subsidize up to 1 000 students per cohort to pursue designated full-time locally-accredited self-financing undergraduate programmes in selected disciplines to nurture talents to meet Hong Kong's social and economic needs. The SSSDP will be implemented on a pilot basis for three cohorts of students, and then subject to a review of its effectiveness.

(e) *VTC*

VTC has been invited to draw up a strategic development plan for its campuses to foster synergy and provide state-of-the-art facilities pivotal to enhancing the image and quality of vocational education. The Government will consider the strategic campus development plan to be submitted by VTC in due course.

(f) *Qualifications Framework Fund ("QF Fund")*

The QF Fund of \$1 billion was established on 1 September 2014 to provide a steady source of income to support the sustainable development and implementation of QF.

10. In his 2015 Policy Address, the Chief Executive highlighted the need to create diversified job opportunities with promising prospects for the younger generation on the one hand, and provide them with varied learning, training and development opportunities on the other hand. No doubt, vocational education plays a key role in nurturing local manpower.

Major views and concerns

11. After commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, the Panel on Education ("the Panel") had pursued with the Administration the latest development of vocational education in Hong Kong. Members also sought information on the progress of various initiatives and the resources implications when examining the Estimates of Expenditure. At the meeting held on 15 July 2015, the Panel met with and exchanged views with the Task Force on the findings and recommendations set out in its report.

Promoting vocational education

12. The Panel was aware of an entrenched bias among some people in the community in favour of traditional academic pursuits. In exchanging views with the Administration and the Task Force, members shared the view that more could be done to promote vocational education as an attractive pathway and to help tackle the entrenched perception that vocational education was only a second choice for school leavers.

13. In this connection, members noted that as announced in the 2014 Policy Address, the Education Bureau ("EDB") would increase the manpower of its Career Guidance Team to provide holistic support to schools in providing career guidance service and life planning education. Starting from the 2014-2015 school year, each public sector school operating classes at senior secondary levels has been provided with an additional recurrent Career and Life Planning Grant at about \$500,000 per annum to strengthen life planning education with a view to facilitating students to understand their own career and academic aspirations and make informed decisions in their study and employment. Members noted that the forums and sharing sessions organized by the Task Force had provided useful opportunities for parents to better understand VET and for VET graduates to share their experience.

14. Some members considered that the Administration should draw useful reference from overseas jurisdictions, such as Germany and Switzerland, where a robust system was in place to enable interested students to pursue vocational education in their senior secondary years. They enquired whether the feasibility of introducing vocational education programmes at senior secondary levels could be explored in Hong Kong. The Administration responded that whilst reference could be made to overseas experience, other factors specific to Hong Kong, such as the demand for trained manpower of individual industries and the development of the senior secondary curriculum, would also need to be considered.

15. The Panel deliberated on the relatively low uptake of vocational education in Hong Kong and measures, if any, to enhance the appeal of vocational training to young people. According to EDB and the Task Force, the low uptake might be attributed to the lack of a clear definition of VET under the relevant government policy in Hong Kong. Members noted that one of the Task Force's recommendations was to rebrand VET in Hong Kong as vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") so as to promote the message of "Every Trade has its Master (行行出專才)". The Task Force also considered it necessary to raise awareness and recognition of VET as an attractive pathway rather than as a second choice for secondary students.

Business-school collaboration

16. Members in general concurred with the importance of strengthening collaboration between industries and vocational training providers, especially in the provision of attachment and practical training. There was a suggestion that the Administration should make reference to the practices of some overseas universities and explore the feasibility of sandwich programmes comprising academic study and practicum training in alternate years.

17. The Administration assured members that all along, it had attached great importance to business-school collaboration. Under the Pilot Scheme implemented by VTC starting from the 2014-2015 academic year, apprenticeship training for targeted industries would be provided to students alongside a guaranteed level of salary and incentive allowance. As informed by EDB, as at February 2015, the electrical & mechanical trades of the construction industry, printing industry, clock & watch industry and automobile industry had joined the Pilot Scheme with 377 apprentices in total. Meanwhile, VTC has also rolled out the Pilot Scheme specifically for the retail industry starting from the 2014-2015 academic year². At the Panel meeting held on 15 July 2015, a member affirmed the usefulness of the Pilot Scheme, and considered that the training programmes offered by the Youth Colleges under VTC provided valuable articulation opportunities for many young people who did not excel in academic studies.

Articulation and progression pathways

18. The attention of the Administration and the Task Force was drawn to the need to provide young people with a full picture of the articulation/progression pathways and future prospect for various types of VET programmes. Some members highlighted that despite the multiple articulation pathways available at VTC, many young people pursuing Diploma in Vocational Education programmes³ might eventually choose to articulate to undergraduate studies instead of taking up employment in the relevant field after completion of their vocational training.

19. Some members were concerned about the vocational education opportunities for sub-degree holders who could not progress to undergraduate programmes, as well as those students who could not complete their secondary education. As advised by the Administration, students who could not attain

² See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB035 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016.

³ Diploma in Vocational Education ("DVE") programmes offered by Youth Colleges of VTC are practically-oriented programmes with strong vocational content in specific disciplines and primarily targeting young people having completed Secondary 3 to 6. Upon successful completion of the prescribed modules, holders of the DVE award (at QF Level 3) will be better equipped for employment and will also be eligible to apply for VTC's Higher Diploma Programmes.

Level 2 in five subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education could apply for the Yi Jin Diploma programmes or Foundation Diploma programmes offered by VTC. At the senior secondary level, vocational education opportunities were available through the implementation of ApL courses, as well as career and life planning education with the Business-School Partnership Programme⁴.

Support for students with special educational needs ("SEN") and non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students

20. Members were deeply concerned about the opportunities for SEN students and NCS students to receive vocational education, as well as the support available to them. The Subcommittee on Integrated Education set up under the Panel noted that VTC had put in place a special admission procedure under which SEN students who met the entrance requirements and assessed to be able to complete the programme during the interview would be offered a place. It was also found that among post-secondary institutions, VTC had a higher intake of SEN students. In fact, according to the provisional figures for the 2014-2015 academic year, the total number of SEN students studying in the member institutions of VTC was 955, of which 478 were enrolled in its Youth College. Meanwhile, the total number of NCS students was 970, of which 570 were studying in the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education/Hong Kong Design Institute⁵.

21. As regards concerns about resources for supporting these students, the Administration explained that starting from the 2013-2014 financial year, an additional recurrent funding of \$12 million is allocated to VTC each year for procuring equipment and learning aids necessary for SEN students, providing them with psychological and student counseling services, and enhancing the support for teaching and learning. Besides, VTC established a new Youth College (i.e. Youth College (Yeo Chei Man)) in the 2012-2013 academic year to provide dedicated support for SEN students and NCS students. For the 2015-2016 academic year, the Government has earmarked about \$25.9 million to support the operation of the Youth College (Yeo Chei Man)⁶. NCS students of VTC's pre-employment programmes enjoy various support services such as

⁴ The Business-School Partnership Programme ("BSPP") launched in 2005 aims to promote better co-operation and closer alliances between the business sector and schools. Through BSPP, enterprises can co-operate with schools in offering a wide range of activities (such as workshops, workplace visits and work experience programmes) for students to facilitate them to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitude for making choices of study/career in accordance with their interests, abilities and orientations.

⁵ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB056 in the Examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016. The total number includes students in publicly-funded and self-financing programmes offered by VTC.

⁶ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB056 in the Examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016

alternative vocational Chinese modules, counseling and coaching and advisory support for articulation and career development.

22. Some members raised concern about the difficulty faced by some SEN students in progressing from the Shine Skills Centre to the Youth College or Chinese Cuisine Training Institute run by VTC due to the more stringent admission requirements of the latter. As the Shine Skills Centre was under the purview of the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB"), members were keen to ensure that the division of policy responsibilities between LWB and EDB should not affect the vocational training opportunities for SEN students. As advised by EDB, it would continue to work closely with VTC and LWB to broaden the articulation pathways for SEN students.

Latest position

23. The Panel conducted an overseas duty visit to Germany and Switzerland in September 2015 to study the policy and implementation of the VET systems in these two countries.

24. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan will move a motion on "Strengthening vocational education" at the Council meeting of 4 November 2015.

25. The Administration will brief the Panel on the progress of the implementation of various initiatives to strengthen vocational education at the meeting to be held on 9 November 2015.

Relevant papers

26. A list of relevant papers on the website of the Legislative Council is at the **Appendix**.

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Subcommittee on Integrated Education	-	Report of the Subcommittee on Integrated Education to the Panel on Education
Panel on Education	8.12.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda CB(4)210/14-15(03) Minutes CB(4)294/14-15(01)
Panel on Education	16.1.2015	Agenda CB(4)358/14-15(01)
Finance Committee	1.4.2015	Administration's replies to members' initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 (Reply serial numbers : EDB035, EDB056, EDB374 and EDB524)
Panel on Education	15.7.2015	Agenda CB(4)1287/14-15(04) Minutes