

For information on  
18 October 2007

**Legislative Council Panel on Manpower**  
**Policy Initiatives of the Education Bureau**  
**in the 2007-08 Policy Agenda**

**Introduction**

This note elaborates on the new and ongoing initiatives in the 2007-08 Policy Agenda to be undertaken by the Education Bureau which are of relevance to this Panel.

**New Initiative**

***Developing Hong Kong as a Regional Education Hub***

2. As the Asian World City with world-class universities, internationally-recognised curriculum and quality assurance mechanism, Hong Kong is well positioned for development as a regional education hub. Leveraging on these strengths, our policy aims to attract quality non-local students to study in Hong Kong and, through this process, further internationalise our higher education sector and increase the exposure of our local students. Attracting non-local talents to live and work in Hong Kong will also address the immediate manpower needs of Hong Kong, and enhance the overall competitiveness of our economy in the long run.

3. We propose to implement a package of measures to further develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub. These include -

- (a) increasing in phases the non-local student quota for publicly-funded programmes at the sub-degree, degree and taught post-graduate levels from 10% to 20% of the approved student number targets for these programmes;
- (b) for self-financing programmes at the sub-degree and degree levels, replacing the existing programme-specific quota with a quota

applicable at the institution level<sup>1</sup>;

- (c) allowing admission of non-local students from the Mainland, Taiwan and Macao<sup>2</sup> for short-term studies at programmes offered by Hong Kong higher education institutions with degree-awarding powers, provided that the cumulative duration of short-term studies taken up by any student does not exceed 180 days within any 12-month period;
- (d) establishing a scholarship endowment fund of \$1 billion for local and non-local students in publicly-funded full-time programmes at degree or above levels;
- (e) exploring alternative options for the provision of student hostels under the existing hostel policy;
- (f) continuing to assist the development of self-financing, non-profit-making local private universities;
- (g) allowing non-local students of full-time locally-accredited programmes at degree or above levels to take up study-related internship arranged by the institutions they are studying in, part-time on-campus employment for not more than 20 hours per week, and off-campus summer jobs during the summer months; and
- (h) allowing non-local students who have obtained a degree or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited programme to take up employment in Hong Kong so long as the job is at a level commonly taken up by degree holders and the remuneration package is at market level and, in respect of non-local fresh graduates with such a qualification, allowing them an initial stay of 12 months on time limitation only.

4. Taken together, the above measures will help to build a better and larger talent pool, make Hong Kong more competitive, and bring economic benefits to the entire community. Specifically, the proposals outlined in

---

<sup>1</sup> Currently, the admission of non-local students from the Mainland, Macao and Taiwan studying full-time locally-accredited self-financing programmes at the sub-degree and degree levels is subject to a programme-specific quota, which is set at 10% of the local student enrolment in the same programme in the preceding year. We propose to replace this with a quota set at 10% of the local student enrolment of all such programmes of the institution in the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> Admission of non-local students from other countries pursuing short term studies is already permitted under the existing policy.

paragraphs 3(g) and 3(h) above concern the employment of non-local students/graduates. Their details and implications for the local labour market are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

(i) *Employment related initiatives (item 3(g) above)*

5. Under existing policy, non-local students, being student visa holders, are not permitted to take up any employment (including internship), whether paid or unpaid, unless with the prior approval of the Director of Immigration. The existing policy is perceived to be more restrictive than other advanced economies such as Australia, the UK and the USA, where non-local students may be allowed to take up some kind of employment whilst studying. Many see this as adversely affecting Hong Kong's attractiveness as a regional education hub. To address these concerns, and in view of the fact that employment experience will give non-local students broader exposure and facilitate their assimilation into the local community upon graduation, we propose to allow non-local students of full-time locally-accredited programmes at degree level or above whose study period is not less than one academic year to take up internship, subject to the following conditions:

- (a) the internships must be study/curriculum-related and be arranged or endorsed by the institutions they are studying in;
- (b) duration of the internship is up to one academic year, or one-third of the normal duration of the relevant full-time academic programme, whichever is the shorter; and
- (c) there is no restriction on the nature of work, level of salary, location, number of working hours, and employers.

6. Moreover, we propose that these students (excluding exchange students) should be permitted to take up part-time on campus employment for not more than 20 hours per week throughout the year, and also employment during the summer months (say June to August) without any restriction in relation to work hours and location.

7. We believe that, given the safeguards as described above, the proposed relaxations in the employment of non-local students should not have significant impact on the local labour market. The requirements that internships must be study-related and arranged or endorsed by the institutions in which the student is studying in will effectively ensure that non-local students

taking up such internships are not competing with local workers for jobs in the open market. The time limit applicable to the length of internship will provide an additional guarantee that this will not be used as a backdoor to secure employment in Hong Kong. Similarly, the requirements that part-time employment of non-local students must take place within the campus of the institution<sup>3</sup>, and the cap of 20 hours per week will ensure that direct competition with local labour will be minimal. Allowing non-local students to take up summer jobs is in line with the practice of many advanced economies. Given the short term and transient nature of such work, overseas experience has been that this is unlikely to pose any significant impact on local employment.

(ii) *Attracting Non-local Students to Stay and Work in Hong Kong (item 3(h) above)*

8. Under the existing policy, non-local students who have obtained a degree or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited programme in Hong Kong (hereafter referred to as “non-local graduates”) other than those from the Mainland may apply to work in Hong Kong under the General Employment Policy (GEP)<sup>4</sup>. For non-local graduates from the Mainland, they may apply to work in Hong Kong through the Arrangement for Employment of Degree or Above Level Mainland Students Graduating from Educational Institutions in Hong Kong<sup>5</sup> or the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals<sup>6</sup>. Non-local graduates applying for extension of stay after the expiry of student visa to facilitate job-hunting are usually granted a three-month grace period.

9. Retaining more non-local graduates will help strengthen Hong Kong’s human capital and competitiveness, which in turn will benefit the

---

<sup>3</sup> The employment must take place within the campus of the institution (including only the campus of the institution which the non-local student is enrolling, and excluding the campus of any subsidiary and associated body of the relevant institution proper or its self-financing arms) where the non-local student is studying or, if the work location is outside campus of the institution, the employer is the institution itself.

<sup>4</sup> The criteria adopted for admission of overseas talents and professionals under the GEP are -

- (a) the applicant is employed in a job relevant to his/her academic qualifications or working experience that cannot be readily taken up by the local workforce (“skills” and “availability” requirements);
- (b) the remuneration package must be commensurate with the prevailing market rate of Hong Kong (“remuneration” requirement); and
- (c) the applicant meets normal immigration requirements (such as holding a valid travel document with adequate returnability to his/her country of residence or citizenship, etc.).

<sup>5</sup> Mainland students who graduated in or after 1990 from full-time degree or above programmes at UGC-funded institutions, or Mainland graduates of full-time locally accredited degree and post-graduate programmes offered by non-UGC funded institutions, are allowed re-entry for employment if they have secured employment offers for a term of appointment of not less than one year, and fulfill similar criteria under GEP.

<sup>6</sup> The Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals was introduced in July 2003 to enable local enterprises to recruit quality personnel from all fields in the Mainland. The admission criteria are similar to those under GEP.

community. Many non-local graduates possess excellent academic standings, and have gained substantial work and/or living experience in Hong Kong. They are often in the early 20s and their stay in Hong Kong will enhance the quality of our population. Furthermore, a more relaxed scheme to allow non-local graduates to stay in Hong Kong will make Hong Kong more attractive to non-local students when making a choice as to where to pursue their studies. It also recognizes that fact that the Hong Kong community has made a considerable investment on these non-local graduates.

10. Against the above considerations, we recommend that a new scheme should be introduced to facilitate non-local students to stay (or return to) and work in Hong Kong after graduation. Under the proposed scheme:

- (a) applications for visa/entry permit made by such graduates will be processed by the Immigration Department basing on the criteria under the GEP, but with the “skills” and “availability” requirements relaxed, i.e. the application will be favourably considered so long as the job is at a level commonly taken up by degree holders and the remuneration package is set at market level. Successful applicants will be given visas/entry permits enabling them to enter Hong Kong for an initial stay of 12 months on time limitation without any condition. Subsequent extension of stay will be granted if they continue their employment in Hong Kong; and
- (b) apart from (a), all non-local fresh graduates, upon application to the Immigration Department, may be granted 12 months’ stay on time limitation without any condition. They are free to take up any employment. Their subsequent applications for extension of stay will be assessed in accordance with (a) above.

Persons admitted under this new scheme may bring in their spouses and unmarried dependent children under the age of 18 as their dependants under the existing dependant policy

11. As non-local graduates are required to take up graduate-level employment with market remuneration, the impact of the proposed scheme on the local labour force should be minimal. With regard to employment at the graduate or above level, many observers have pointed out that, as Hong Kong becomes an economy that is increasingly knowledge based, the demand for talent at this level far exceeds supply. Many also firmly believe that Hong Kong should continue to make it a priority to increase its talent pool at this level

as this will make Hong Kong as a whole more competitive, eventually benefiting everyone in our community.

## **On-going Initiative**

*Implementing a qualifications framework by phases through the formation of industry training advisory committees to develop competency-based qualifications for individual industries, and developing a quality assurance mechanism to underpin the qualifications framework.*

12. The Chief Executive announced in the 2004 Policy Address the establishment of a Qualifications Framework (QF) to provide a platform for life-long learning and to enable learners to progress along a clear articulation pathway. The QF is a seven-level hierarchy against which academic, vocational and continuing education qualifications can be benchmarked. All qualifications to be recognized under the QF will have to be quality assured. The implementation of the QF will not only benefit individual employees but also enhance the competitiveness of our industries and the Hong Kong economy. The main facets of QF implementation are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

### *Industry-led development*

13. To ensure that the education and training programmes provided for an industry meet its specific manpower needs, EDB has been assisting industries to set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) to, among other things, develop Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for individual industries. So far, ITACs have been formed for 12 industries, namely, Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Beauty, Logistics, and Banking. These industries together have covered over 600,000 employees, or around 18% of the labour force. We will continue to reach out to employers, employees, professional bodies and other stakeholders in other industries to promote the formation of ITACs.

14. The first seven ITACs (i.e. ITACs for the Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Information & Communications Technology (Software Services), Chinese Catering, and Jewellery) have completed drafting of the SCSs. The SCSs will become the basis for curriculum design of training courses for the industries concerned.

Starting from January 2007, we have piloted the introduction of SCS-based courses under the Skills Upgrading Scheme covering the Watch & Clock, Printing & Publishing and Hairdressing industries. As of mid September 2007, over 2000 learners have enrolled in these courses and their feedback is promising.

### *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*

15. We are also formulating an RPL mechanism for the purpose of recognizing the skills, knowledge and experience of in-service and experienced workers. The prime objective of RPL is to facilitate employees' continuing learning and skills upgrading so that they need not start from the basics when attending training and that repeated training on similar subjects/skills can be minimized.

### *Transitional Arrangement*

16. Upon thorough discussions with the ITACs and the labour unions, we have agreed to introduce a five-year transitional period under the RPL mechanism. The transitional period for a particular industry will kick start after the assessment agency concerned has started receiving RPL applications from workers of the relevant industries. During the transitional period, workers may apply for recognition of QF qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 based on their years of service and relevant working experience without the need to undergo assessments (though they may still opt to obtain RPL through assessments). After the transitional period, all levels of RPL qualifications in a particular industry could only be attained through assessment. The form of assessments will be in line with the skills and knowledge required of the individual levels and may vary from industry to industry and level to level (possible formats include interviews, trade tests, workplace demonstrations, etc). It is suggested that a simpler form of assessment (such as interview) for QF Level 1 would be adopted.

### *Pilot Scheme*

17. Upon the full commencement of the Accreditation of the Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) in early 2008, we shall introduce a two-year RPL pilot scheme for the first three industries that have finalized their respective SCSs, namely Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock and Hairdressing. These industries have extensively discussed and reached a preliminary consensus on the mode of operation and specific arrangements for

the RPL mechanism.

18. We have undertaken to review the pilot scheme one year after its implementation, and will maintain close liaison with the industries and labour unions throughout the process. Subject to the outcome of the review, we shall consider how the mechanism can be extended to cover other industries that have formulated SCSs. We shall report the review outcome and our recommendations to the LegCo Manpower Panel at an appropriate juncture.

### *Quality Assurance*

19. Quality assurance (QA) is the cornerstone of the QF. 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, the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (AAVQ) Bill was enacted by the LegCo in May 2007.

20. Under the AAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 592), the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation has been renamed as the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) with effect from 1 October 2007, and be specified as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority. The HKCAAVQ has been entrusted with the responsibility for assuring the quality of the programmes and qualifications recognized under the QF. Also as the QR Authority, the Council is required to administer the QR, a web-based database on qualifications, learning programmes and providers that are recognised under the QF.

21. Separately, an Appeal Board under the Ordinance has been established to draw up rules and procedure for handling appeals against “QF-related decisions”<sup>7</sup> of the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority. Such rules are subsidiary legislation and are expected to be endorsed by the LegCo in early 2008. The QF will be formally launched in early 2008.

### *QF Support Schemes*

22. In June 2007, we sought approval of the LegCo’s Finance Committee for a provision of \$208 million for launching various financial

---

<sup>7</sup> “QF-related decisions” refer to the accreditation decisions made by the Accreditation Authority and those made by the QR Authority on the entry of a qualification into the QR.

assistance schemes which aim to encourage stakeholders' participation in the QF, as well as to reduce the burden that the quality assurance and related measures may bring to bear on them, particularly at the initial stage of the QF implementation. These schemes include accreditation grants for training providers, subsidies for QR registration and maintenance fees, start up grants for RPL Assessment Agencies, and reimbursement of RPL assessment fees for workers who pursue further education or training. The support schemes will be implemented after the full commencement of the AAVQ Ordinance in early 2008.

### **Members' Views**

23. We welcome Members' views on the above initiatives.

Education Bureau  
October 2007