

**For discussion
on 8 December 2014**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Implementation of Vocational Education in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest developments of vocational education in Hong Kong.

Overview

2. The Government is committed to providing quality, flexible and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points for secondary school leavers. As vocational education plays a pivotal role 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, the Government attaches great importance to it. However, there is an entrenched bias among some in the community towards traditional academic pursuits. Some are also not well informed of the articulation options provided under the vocational education system and the recognition of the relevant qualifications attained. More can be done to promote vocational education as an attractive pathway and help tackle the entrenched perception of vocational education being a second choice.

Qualifications Framework

3. First of all, it is worthy to note that the Qualifications Framework (QF) has been underpinning the development of vocational education in Hong Kong, alongside academic and continuing education. In May 2008, the Government launched QF 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.

4. Under QF, Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs) are drawn up by different Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)¹, 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 including in-house training to meet the needs of the sectors. The use of QF credits and the policy and principles for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) introduced under QF have further enhanced articulation among qualifications from different sectors.

Vocational education at senior secondary level

5. At the senior secondary level, career related and vocational education in secondary school is facilitated through a variety of learning opportunities: Applied Learning (ApL) courses and the career-related experiences embedded in the Other Learning Experiences activities. These programmes and activities complement the core and elective subjects of the senior secondary curriculum for holistic learning. ApL courses, which are subjects with stronger elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields, have attracted a considerable number of students. They have been introduced as elective subjects for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination. In the 2013/14 school year, around 320 secondary schools offered 37 ApL courses in six different areas² for about 10 000 Secondary 5 and 6 students. Different courses³ are offered under each area of studies in ApL to better suit the learning interests and needs of students. Students may choose one or two ApL course(s) to understand fundamental theories and concepts, develop generic skills and career-related competencies necessary to prepare themselves for further studies and employment in the future. In the 2014 HKDSE examination, there were over 4 330 candidates registered in ApL subjects. Attainment in ApL subjects is recognised for admission to post-secondary programmes either as elective subjects or considered for award of extra bonus or as additional information, depending on institutions, faculties and programmes.

¹ 20 ITACs have been established so far, covering 48% of the workforce in Hong Kong. The industries/sector covered are Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Beauty, Logistics, Banking, Import & Export, Testing, Inspection & Certification, Retail, Insurance, Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals and Plastics), Elderly Care Service, Security Services and Human Resource Management.

² The six areas are Creative Studies; Media and Communication; Business, Management and Law; Services; Applied Science; and Engineering and Production.

³ Recently added and revised courses include Applied Business Research, Practical Computerised Accounting, Child Care and Education, Foundation in Chinese Medicine, Exploring Psychology, and Mobile and Online Applications Development.

6. Currently, five out of 37 ApL courses have been quality assured for recognition under QF (QF Level 3) under a pilot exercise. The pilot exercise will continue to explore linking some more ApL courses to QF in due course so that apart from the HKDSE certificate, students successfully completing the ApL courses may obtain a separate QF-recognised qualification to facilitate further studies in the relevant fields or entry into the industries concerned.

Vocational education at post-secondary level

7. At the sub-degree level (QF Level 4), 259 (64%) of the approximately 400 full-time sub-degree programmes offered in the 2013/14 academic year (AY) are Higher Diploma (HD) programmes⁴, accounting for 60% of the total sub-degree student enrolment. At least 60% of HD programme curriculum is devoted to specialised content in specific disciplines, professions or vocational skills. HD programmes seek to enable students to acquire the appropriate attitude, knowledge and skills to support their initial employment at the para-professional level. Notable examples include HD in Airfreight Management and Global Logistics, HD in International Hospitality and Tourism Management, etc. Apart from local post-secondary institutions, some other programme providers such as hospitals are also offering vocational sub-degree programmes such as HD in General Nursing.

8. At the undergraduate level (QF Level 5), some higher education institutions are also offering degree programmes with strong professional/vocational element. Examples include Bachelor of Architecture, Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Science in Testing and Certification, Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing Major), Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy, etc. 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. Separately, the Technological and Higher Education Institute (THEi) under the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has started offering undergraduate programmes with strong professional/vocational

⁴ According to the Common Descriptors for HD under the New Academic Structure promulgated for compliance by all post-secondary institutions, at least 60% of HD's curriculum must consist of specialised contents (e.g. learning related to concentrations, disciplines and professions and vocational skills, etc). At the end of the HD programme, the student should demonstrate, among other things, an acquisition of the attitude, theoretical knowledge and practical skills at the para-professional level of a certain discipline, and integration of theory with practice, so as to apply these principles more widely especially in an employment context.

elements since the 2012/13 AY, with disciplines such as design, engineering, hospitality and health care.

Other vocational education programmes

9. Apart from the above, there is a wide array of full-time and part-time certificates and diploma programmes primarily targeting young people having completed Secondary 3 to 6 and working adults who wish to acquire training or formal qualifications using alternative pathways. Notable examples are VTC's Diploma of Vocational Education (DVE) programmes, apprenticeship schemes and Foundation Diploma programmes as well as Yi Jin Diploma⁵ programmes. These are practically-oriented programmes with strong vocational content in specific disciplines.

Statutory bodies

10. Currently, there are four statutory bodies that are involved in providing vocational education and training. They are VTC, Construction Industry Council (CIC), Clothing Industry Training Authority (CITA) and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB).

- (a) VTC, being a statutory subvented organisation and the major VET provider in Hong Kong, offers a wide range of full-time and part-time vocational education and training programmes which lead to formal qualifications from post-Secondary 3 up to degree levels (i.e. QF Levels 2 to 5) with multiple entry and exit points and clear articulation pathways within the entire VTC system. VTC provides about 250 000 training places each year, offering people of different education levels with pre-employment and in-service programmes, including full-time HD and diploma courses, in-service short training programmes, training programmes for non-engaged youths and apprentice training. VTC has 13 member institutions⁶ which provide different progression pathways for career advancement and lifelong learning to students and industry personnel;

⁵ Launched in the 2012/13 AY, the YJD programme provides an alternative articulation pathway for Secondary 6 school leavers as well as learners aged 21 or above to obtain formal qualifications for the purposes of employment and further studies. The YJD programme is offered by some member institutions of the Federation of Self-financing Tertiary Education.

⁶ They are Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi), Institute of Professional Education and Knowledge (PEAK), School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE), Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE), Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI), International Culinary Institute (ICI), Hospitality Industry Training and Development Centre (HITDC), Chinese Cuisine Training Institute (CCTI), Maritime Services Training Institute (MSTI), Youth College, Pro-Act by VTC, Integrated Vocational Development Centre (IVDC) and Shine Skills Centre.

- (b) CIC is a statutory body comprising stakeholders of the construction industry. It provides advice and reflects needs to the Government on behalf of the industry. It also deploys the collected levies to implement various measures to support the development of the industry, including nurturing manpower and enhancing the skill levels of construction personnel;
- (c) CITA is a statutory body that provides training courses for the clothing and related industries. It operates two training centres to deliver both full-time and part-time courses at technician and craftsman levels or above. CITA also runs retraining programmes related to the clothing and related industries for ERB; and
- (d) ERB is a statutory body that co-ordinates, funds and monitors training courses and services. Its service targets are people aged 15 or above with an education attainment at sub-degree level or below. It provides a diverse range of courses under the Manpower Development Scheme. Programmes include full-time placement-tied courses for the unemployed, part-time non-placement-tied generic skills training courses and “Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus” courses with skills enhancement training for the unemployed and in-service workers and courses for special target groups.

New Policy Initiatives related to Vocational Education

11. In the 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 our education system and guide the younger generation in choosing their career.”*, and announced a series of measures to strengthen vocational education and support its development alongside academic education –

- (a) Pilot Training and Support Scheme (Pilot Scheme) – With the approval of the Legislative Council Finance Committee 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. Under the Pilot Scheme, apprenticeship training for targeted industries will be provided to students alongside a guaranteed level of salary and incentive allowance.

The electrical & mechanical trades of the construction industry, printing industry and clock & watch industry have joined the Pilot Scheme so far. The Scheme will benefit 2 000 students in total;

- (b) Industrial Attachment – Starting from the 2014/15 AY, 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 DVE programmes. Industrial attachment, which provides a real-life organizational context for students to develop specific or generic skills, could effectively enhance students' employability and allow them to better adapt to work environment after graduation;
- (c) Task Force on Promotion of Vocation Education (Task Force) – The setting up of the Task Force aims to step up efforts in promoting vocational education in Hong Kong, given the entrenched bias among some towards traditional academic pursuits and the pivotal role played by vocational education in integrating education and employment in support of Hong Kong's development. The Task Force was set up in June 2014 with view to mapping out a strategy to promote vocational education and raise the public awareness and recognition towards vocational education. Its Members are drawn from a mix of expertise and backgrounds, including those from the vocational education and training sector, various businesses and industries, as well as those possessing good knowledge of education, parent education, youth and public relations. The Task Force will submit a report to the Secretary for Education by mid-2015;
- (d) 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;
- (e) Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) – With the approval of the Legislative Council Finance Committee in July 2014 for a commitment of some \$960 million, the Government will, starting from the 2015/16 AY, subsidise 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. Selected disciplines for the first cohort of

students to be admitted in the 2015/16 AY include health care, architecture and engineering, testing and certification, creative industry, logistics, and tourism and hospitality. SSSDP will be implemented on a pilot basis for three cohorts of students, and then subject to a review on its effectiveness; and

- (f) 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. The QF Fund will further encourage relevant stakeholders to participate in QF, thereby supporting the development of vocational education alongside academic and continuing education.

12. Apart from the above, starting from the 2014/15 school year, public sector schools operating classes at senior secondary levels are provided with an additional recurrent grant benchmarked to the mid-point salary of a graduate teacher to introduce more life planning education elements. In parallel, the Government has encouraged greater participation of business establishments and engagement of community resources in the Business-School Partnership Programme. These efforts will also contribute positively to the development of vocational education in Hong Kong.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to note the latest developments of vocational education in Hong Kong.

**Education Bureau
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