



Submission of Our Hong Kong Foundation’s Views and Comments on the ‘Consultation Document of Task Force on Promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training’

We would like to affirm the preliminary observations and recommendations set forth in the Consultation Document, which have covered the relevant issues in the field of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET). We hope to supplement and lend our support to the Consultation Document by highlighting several points regarding relevant education policy. We firmly believe that considering the following points could help make the Task Force’s effort on Promotion of VPET more holistic and comprehensive. OHKF’s supplementary recommendations are presented below on 6 main areas:

- Promotion in Secondary Schools
- Enhancing VPET through Applied Learning
- Professional Vocational Qualifications at degree level
- Strengthening of Higher Diploma in sub-degree level
- The development of Vocational Route to enhance lifelong learning
- Other related considerations

1. Promotion in Secondary Schools

Chapter 2 Paragraph 2.9 of the Consultation Document suggests the Government to step up promotion of VPET-related activities for junior secondary students, BSPP partners can be encouraged to provide career exploration activities for junior secondary school students to enhance students’ exposure.

1.1. Setting up an intermediary body to facilitate quality career education

The Business-School Partnership Programme (BSPP) was established in 2005 to “promote better cooperation and closer alliances between the business sector and schools”. The majority of their activities take the form of talks, workshops and visits. In our view, business-school partnership should also involve strategic knowledge transfer between academia and the industries, such as bringing industry knowledge into the curriculum and assessment processes, as well as supporting industry professionals to take the role of applied education assessors. To ramp up these efforts, we recommend setting up an intermediary body tasked to incorporate BSPP’s existing elements with strategic knowledge transfer.



Furthermore, there could be a funding scheme set up under the intermediary to support non-profit, non-governmental organisations that achieve the same purpose. This helps to involve efforts from various sectors, pooling together ideas and resources to enhance business-school partnerships.

1.2. Mandating career education as a compulsory teaching component with designated teaching hours

Career education should be made a compulsory teaching component with designated teaching hours. Nowadays, more countries put greater emphasis on students' career planning and development, and have established statutory frameworks that set out career education provision standards (e.g. curriculum and guidance). For instance, in Austria, careers education (known as "Berufsorientierung" or "BO") is a mandatory subject, totaling 32 hours per year. Lessons are provided to 7th and 8th-grade students (age 12-14). In the UK, although career education is currently not a compulsory subject, schools start teaching it as a course to children since primary school years.

1.3. Implementing intensive career programs with less academic burden to deepen career exposure in junior secondary level

The Government can consider implementing intensive career programmes in schools to facilitate students' career exposure. It is important to lessen the academic burden, so as to create space to students to explore their interests and career opportunities. In South Korea, for example, all middle schools have implemented the "Free Learning Semester" (FMS) since 2016. During that period, students are exempted from taking exams; they only attend classes in the morning, and engage in career exploration activities in the afternoon.

1.4. Boosting industry exchange opportunities for both current and future teachers to strengthen their ability to provide career support

Exposure and knowledge of the landscape and development of industries are important prerequisites for teachers to deliver career education. Teachers should be given space to receive mentorship and placement to learn future career opportunities, as well as latest market trends and developments. In the UK, a non-governmental organisation, called STEM Learning, organises the ENTHUSE placement program—a course providing STEM secondary school teachers with one to two week placements at universities and/or industries. Teachers receive mentorship and training to learn new STEM-related knowledge, future career opportunities, as well as latest market trends and developments.



Chapter 2 Paragraph 2.12 of the Consultation Document emphasizes the importance to **enhance parents' understanding of the opportunities and prospect of VPET through various channels including regular communications between schools and parents, workplace visits under BSPP and more targeted promotion efforts.**

1.5. Involving parents in their children's career development process through career counsellors

More emphasis should be placed on parental engagement in students' career counselling processes. Parents play an important role in their children's career development, and several countries have already established career counselling systems targeted at parents. In Germany, the Government has established agencies and centres for students and parents to access career guidance services. Career counsellors provide details of possible learning pathways, in addition to updated labour market information and psychological counselling services to parents in order for them to better understand their children's possible future development paths.

2. Enhancing VPET through Applied Learning

Chapter 2 Paragraph 2.14 of the Consultation Document suggests the scope of **VPET-related ApL courses can be broadened with contents enriched to include more vocationally-related elements**, with a view to better equipping students and raising their awareness to pursue VPET in continuing education and employment.

2.1. Broadening the manifesto of Committee of Applied Learning under the Curriculum Development Council to include inter-disciplinary delivery of STEM/ Applied Education across key learning areas

Under the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), there is a functional committee for Applied Learning to “plan and coordinate Applied Learning curriculum development”, and to advise on “education policies and strategies related to Applied Learning”. In our view, the manifesto of this committee can be broadened into inter-disciplinary Applied Education such that learning components combining hands-on practice with theoretical learning can be applied across key learning areas, including but not limited to STEM. This helps gearing curriculum development towards future skills requirement.



Chapter 2 Paragraph 2.16 of the Consultation Document emphasizes on the engagement of industrial partners from different sectors should be made a necessary condition in the development and design of VPET-related courses in ApL. Institutions providing ApL courses should also be further encouraged to consider **designing ApL courses with closer reference to competency standards of respective trades under the QF where applicable.**

2.2. Magnifying Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITAC)'s influence on skills demand/ supply by creating a more accessible SCS and translating SCS into dual education programmes

Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) in Hong Kong are tasked to draw up Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for the relevant sectors. This provides a basis for course providers to design training courses to meet the sectors' needs.

To strengthen the role of ITACs/ SCSs in the skills system, the Government can consider revamping them to gear towards easily accessible (often web-based), easily updated (instead of every five years) and broad-based competency standards covering more job roles in the labour force. This should be supplemented by funding incentives for educational institutions to set up industry-led education programmes and teach according to these SCSs. ITACs should also involve in creating assessment methods that industries can use to assess both interviewees and current employees.

2.3. Supporting ApL subjects via BSPP

The intermediary body, as recommended in paragraph 1.1, has an important role to play in the curriculum design process, as it is designated with the task of knowledge transfer between industry and schools. As such, this body should act as the provider/trainer of assessors as well as the carrier of knowledge between industry and schools.



3. Professional Vocational Qualifications at the degree level

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.6 of the Consultation Document details the need to **review the positioning of VPET in the higher education system in Hong Kong**. Specifically, the Government should **explore the merits of developing professional vocational qualifications at the degree level** (e.g. vocational degree with primary orientation towards practical skills), which should be differentiated from conventional degrees by **a combination of basic theoretical components of academic degree and practical learning, industry experience and recognition** by the relevant professional and specialised trades.

3.1. **Developing Applied Education in tertiary level with reference to University of Applied Sciences internationally**

University of Applied Sciences (UAS) is a common concept in Europe, and it has been gaining traction worldwide in recent years due to its ability to steer technological innovation in the digital era. We view it as the key to delivering professional vocational qualifications and Applied Education on the tertiary level.

In Hong Kong, however, in the absence of a holistic strategy as well as targeted policies to develop UAS, academic and applied degree programmes share the same admission procedures and funding mechanisms. This has hampered the ability of institutions offering applied degree programmes (often non-academic ones) to find the right talents. Moreover, the current funding mechanism and governance structure fails to provide sufficient resources for developing top-notch programmes and to incentivise an industry-driven curriculum.

3.2. **Gravitating towards an aptitude-based admission mechanism that accepts industry qualifications**

Hong Kong employs a different model compared with most other countries including Germany, UK and mainland China where governments create multiple education pathways via multiple assessment methods. While the absence of multiple assessment methods promotes integrated learning and reduces the possibility of stigmatisation, it also limits the flexibility for students. As such, maximising the flexibility within the one assessment is of paramount importance; this can be done via a more flexible curriculum, or a more flexible progression to degree level.

To build an aptitude-based admission mechanism offering enhanced flexibility from HKDSE core subject requirements, and placing greater weight on related



experiences (including but not limited to learning profiles, interviews and personal interest), we would introduce the following policy recommendations:

- (i) Self-financing institutions are subject to a stringent requirement limiting non-standard admission to 5% of the total cohort. This creates a misalignment between the admission requirements and the targeted applicants. Relaxing the requirement allows schools to develop aptitude tests of their own and to take in fitting students.
- (ii) To find the right talents with greater flexibility, the Government could allow programmes under the SSSDP to directly admit students while JUPAS is still ongoing, on a relaxed or even removed quota (from the current 10%). It is important to note that a relaxed direct admission quota reflects an ideology allowing for flexible entrance but vigorous quality assurance; hence, it does not represent a compromise of quality for graduates from self-financing programmes.

3.3. Incentivising industry-led education through a revamped and integrated subsidy scheme

One core element of applied education is an industry-led curriculum that combines academic study with practical training. These partnership programmes are currently limited in Hong Kong, and requires more governmental support.

Currently, the amount of subsidies available (through SSSDP and NMTSS) for those enrolled in self-financing institutions are substantially lower compared to UGC-funded programmes. We recommend a holistic review of subsidy schemes targeting SFIs covering first-year-first-degrees, top-up degrees and higher diplomas. The revamped funding scheme should include school-based subsidy (and not just only student-based); possible mechanisms include subsidy-matching schemes for student/schools, or fixed subsidies linked to the unit cost of these programmes, with possible reference to the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) in secondary school. An integration of SSSDP and NMTSS should encourage the development of quality UAS degrees and promote “dual-education”.

The role of the Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education (CSPE) should be strengthened to advise the Government on the range of subsidies and contribute to the governance of the integrated subsidy scheme, expanding its role to provide strategic and policy advice on the development of the self-financing sector. Ultimately, an increase in resources contributes to the long-term competitiveness of self-financing programmes and allows the Government to take a greater role in the overall governance, strategy (especially in Applied



Education) and quality assurance of the SFIs. The CSPE should act as a funding advisor or even funding allocator under the integrated subsidy scheme.

4. **Strengthening of Higher Diploma in sub-degree level**

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.10 of the Consultation Document proposes the reinforcement of the role of Higher Diploma (HD) qualifications as a key VPET pathway at the post-secondary level.

4.1. **Providing a clear articulation pathway from HD to Applied degrees**

As sub-degree education continues to expand in Hong Kong's post-secondary education system, the role of the Associate Degree (AD) and Higher Diploma (HD) should be better differentiated.

Under the binary system of sub-degree education, AD is positioned as a bridging qualification for articulation to academic degree education, while HD qualification connects graduates to VPET-related degrees or employment on a para-professional level in certain industries.

By developing applied degrees, the role of HD as a key pathway to VPET-related degrees could be strengthened. This formulates a clear distinction between the two sub-degree qualifications leading to academic and applied degrees respectively.

5. **The development of Vocational Route to enhance lifelong learning**

Chapter 3 Paragraph 3.14 of the Consultation Document recommends the Government to explore the development of ***a vocational route whereby professional skill-based vocational qualifications can be acquired through an appropriate combination of vocational training at schools and workplace assessment or in-service training and duly recognised under the QF in close partnership with the industries.***

5.1. **Accepting professional accreditations (under QF) as a part of degree admission criteria (coupled with language requirements)**

To facilitate lifelong learning, there is a need to construct a parallel academic/professional qualification ladder where there can be free transfer between academic and professional pathways, or even between professions.



The Qualifications Framework (QF) has various schemes facilitating lifelong learning. For example, numerous diplomas and certificates are classified into different levels to construct a Vocational Qualifications Pathway (VQP); the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) allows practitioners' experiences to be recognized in the form of QF; and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (RPQ) broadens the amount of agencies recognised to provide professional qualifications, and therefore the variety of qualifications recognised.

That said, the connectivity between adjacent QF levels remains unsatisfactory. Degree admission (to QF5) is a good example as most institutions only consider HKDSE admission or sub-degrees amongst local qualifications available, but not other professional qualifications also under the QF. Similarly, a number of sub-degrees only consider part of the QF3 diplomas (e.g. DVE or other school-based diplomas, such as the Diploma of Creative Arts by Shau Kee School of Creativity, may not be considered).

For University of Applied Sciences, it is imperative to consider professional qualifications not only to connect QF levels to each other, but more importantly, to allow learners not suited to the academic route to take an alternative development pathway in the professional world before returning to university studies to supplement their practical knowledge with a theoretical or managerial perspective. Various initiatives (VQP, RPL, RPQ) as mentioned above has laid down a foundation for schools to accept these qualifications as part of their admission criteria.

5.2. Lowering age requirement of mature applicants to 21 (from 25); listing out accreditations considered

With a stated goal of supporting lifelong learning, degree-offering institutions allow students above the age of 25 years to apply for their programmes on a case-by-case basis. However, the age requirement is arbitrary and could be lowered to age 21 with reference to the practice in the UK. Besides, clear criteria and guidelines should be laid out for mature applicants, e.g. what qualifications would be considered and the processes involved, in order for students to regard this as a viable study pathway.



6. Other related considerations

6.1 **Strengthening the Human Resources Planning Commission (HRPC)’s role in integrating future economic, manpower and skills planning; with targeted efforts to facilitate industry-led programmes and enhance resource allocation**

Inter-bureau efforts remain limited in Hong Kong. While a high-level Human Resources Planning Commission was established under the Chief Secretary for Administration in 2018 in Hong Kong, the only policy decision made is to set up “a new integrated portal on manpower information.

The HRPC should help the Government to step up inter-bureau efforts to translate economy and manpower planning into skills planning for the future, making a match between industries where skills are demanded and schools where talents are developed. This not only brings bureaus closer to each other, but also businesses and schools to facilitate cooperation and to develop programmes for a future-ready workforce. Specifically:

1. The HRPC should act as a platform where the Labour and Welfare Bureau’s reports on manpower projections can be enhanced by taking into consideration inputs from the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau as well as the Innovation and Technology Bureau. Such official collaborations are critical to ensure that the manpower projections reflect current and future industry needs due to market dynamics and government policies.
2. The HRPC should consider broadening manpower requirements on specific disciplines in degree places allocation (including the UGC and self-financing institutions) to align policy and funding objectives with the Government’s planning parameters. This creates more degree-level programmes that can produce graduates equipped with 21st century skills. For example, currently only about 1/6 of the UGC-funded programmes are allocated with specific manpower needs in mind, and this ratio can potentially be broadened. The UGC should also be present in the HRPC.
3. The HRPC should make targeted efforts at industries that represent the future economic development focus, facilitating more degree-level programmes that can produce graduates suited to social needs. It should continuously review



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new business developments and consolidate efforts from different stakeholders, including the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, ITACs, Vocational Training Council and its training boards, the Employees Retraining Board, and the UGC.

The Consultation Document has provided a thorough review of the current strategy and has made key recommendations that target some of the flaws of the current strategy. We hope that a more comprehensive report would help the Government in forming a holistic approach towards Vocational and Professional Education and Training.

We have also enclosed our research materials on Applied Education for your reference, which covers Applied Education on a broader scope, including but not limited to VPET, curriculum development and self-financing post-secondary education.

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