

Promotion of Vocational/Professional Education and Training

(Consultation Document—MWYO Submission)*

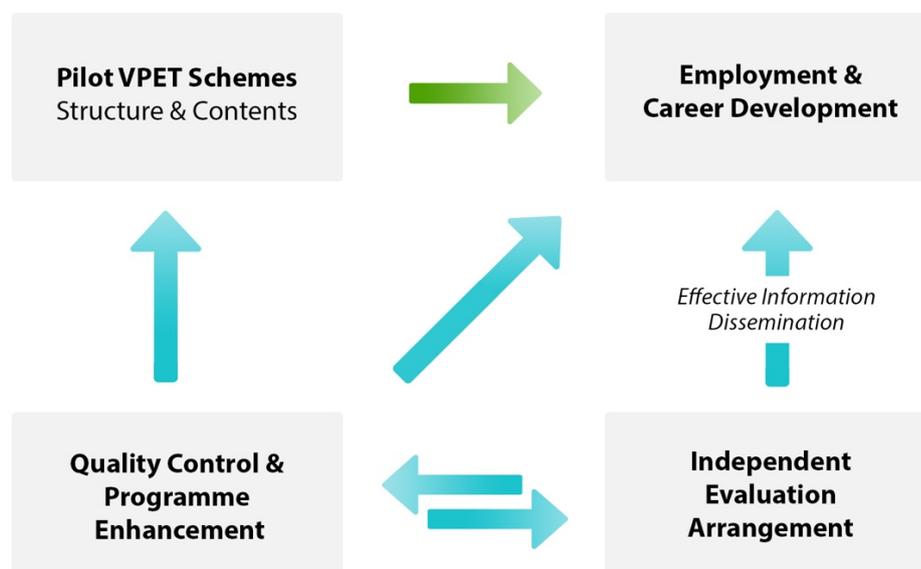
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Conceptual Framework for Effective Promotion of VPET

The best promotion strategy of VPET would be developing and implementing successful programmes with good employment and career prospects. In order to achieve this objective, the Education Bureau, VTC and other relevant authorities should undertake the following actions:

- (i) designing “successful” programmes;
- (ii) implementing vigorous quality control and programme enhancement measures;
- (iii) having independent evaluation arrangement (including longitudinal assessment) to assess the “successfulness” of these programmes;
- (iv) advancing employment opportunities and career prospects; and
- (v) disseminating information effectively regarding the “successfulness” of such programmes to parents, teachers and students.

A Framework for Effective Promotion of VPET



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**(I) Policy Recommendations (1a and 1b)
for the “Pilot Training and Support Scheme”**

Under the conceptual framework, we would like to make a reference to the “Pilot Training and Support Scheme”. The important “Pilot Training and Support Scheme” under VPET was firstly introduced in 2014/15, with a budget of HK\$144 million. Apprenticeship training from targetted industries will be provided to students alongside with a guaranteed level of salary and incentive allowance. The programme was extended twice in 2016/17 and 2018/19, each for two years. According to the 2018/19 Budget (para. 127), the government will provide adequate resources to regularise the Scheme. There are some weaknesses in the current Pilot Schemes, which could only be reviewed by vigorous independent evaluation. They are:

- (i) inadequate participation by employers;
- (ii) high drop-out rates;
- (iii) low retention rate as a high proportion of graduates may quit the sponsoring firms after graduation;
- (iv) insufficient sectors were covered;
- (v) inadequate government supports; and
- (vi) weak and uncertain career prospects as perceived by stakeholders.

Recommendation (1a)--Sharing More Cost by Government

As the programmes under the “Pilot Training and Support Scheme” are mostly industry-specific, instead of firm-specific, a large proportion of graduates may move to other firms after graduation from the sponsoring firm. This will prove very costly for these firms and thus reduce their incentive of participation. Indeed, according to the official answer to Legislator Ho Kai-ming’s question on 9/11/2016, for the first patch of graduates of the pilot scheme for the retail industry, only 17 out of the 86 graduates (totally 53% of graduates responded to the survey) remained as the full-time employees of their respective sponsoring companies. In order to mitigate this crucial weakness, the contribution by firms should be reduced substantially.

According to the apprenticeship funding scheme of England (March 2019, para. 6), if an employer has not paid the apprenticeship levy and would like to train an apprentice, they need to co-invest in the scheme. The employer will be required to pay only 5% of training and assessment costs for their apprentices. The government will cover the remaining costs of 95%. All payments are made directly to the training provider. In Hong Kong, the private/public proportion of co-investment of the “Pilot Training and Support Scheme” is HK\$8,000/2,000. This is likely to be too much for employers, comparing with the England’s apprenticeship scheme and the public subsidy provided to other local education programmes. Moreover, the minimum required-salary after graduation (at HK\$10,500) seems too low for the retention of graduates.

It is recommended that the contribution by employers into the Scheme should substantially be reduced (e.g., a 50% reduction) and the minimum salary for graduates under these programmes should reasonably be increased (e.g., by 10%). A higher contribution by the

government into the apprenticeship scheme implies more subsidies to employers. Thus, a set of parameters should be identified to determine what kind of schemes should deserve larger subsidies. In principle, apprenticeship schemes which are more industry-specific, rather than firm-specific, should deserve more subsidies by the government.

Recommendation (1b)--Undertaking Independent VPET Assessment

In the FCR(2014-15)⁴ document (para. 12), it was stated that VTC should review the percentage of trainees who successfully joined the relevant trades and their retention rates in the respective industries. According to the 2018/19 Budget (para. 127), the Education Bureau should also review the implementation of the Scheme this year to finalise the regularisation arrangements.

So far, it seems that a proper assessment of the Scheme has not been completed and made public. Also, there is no indication that the evaluation has been done independently. According to the apprenticeship document of England, it was stated that all apprenticeship standards should include an end-point assessment (including employment status of graduates, salary levels, employers' feedback, etc.) which must be delivered by organisations independent of the training provider.

One relevant case in hand is the Hong Kong Audit Report 72 (4/2019) on "Hospitality Training Provided by Hotel and Tourism Institute, the Chinese Culinary Institute and the International Culinary Institute" which suggested that VTC did not undertake an adequate job in evaluating the performance of such programmes. But the Audit Report fell short of recommending the engaging of an independent assessment agency.

Naturally, Hong Kong parents and students do not have sufficient confidence in the assessment results provided by VTC. Following the British experience (England's Apprenticeship Funding Report, March 2019, para. 55), it is highly desirable to engage an independent third-party to undertake such assessment exercises, which should be able to induce more confidence in stakeholders and provide more relevant information for the enhancement of such programmes to advance employment opportunities.

(II) Policy Recommendations (2a and 2b) for Higher Diploma Programmes

Currently, there are about 9,000 associate degree graduates per year. In 2016/17, the total number of graduates was 8,246, with 84.3% going for further studies (44.5% for UGC funded degree-level programmes and 36.0% for self-funded degree-level programmes). Most of the programmes are general degrees which do not prepare the students for future technical and professional development directly.

Recommendation (2a)--Expanding Higher Diploma Programmes

According to the Report of “Task Force on Review of Self-Financing Post-Secondary Education”, it was clearly stated that “Higher Diploma (HD) education should be reinvigorated with stepped-up Government support measures as Higher Diploma education is able to generate appropriate trained human resources needed by many industries” (point VIII of recommendations). Along this line, we recommend that institutions currently offer associate degree (AD) programmes should seriously consider diverting resources into providing relevant HD programmes which are in need by the society for long-term development. The government may provide additional incentives as well.

Recommendation (2b)--Introducing Bridging HD Programmes (and SSSDP Programmes) for AD Graduates

Furthermore, we recommend the introduction of bridging programmes for AD graduates to obtain HD degrees. As graduates with AD are likely to fulfil very similar general courses under the HD stream, it is highly probable that some popular HD courses can be re-structured (condensing into a one-year course) to attract them to change their career path. All the general and generic courses can be exempted.

We should not regard this a wastage of the resources of the community nor that of AD graduates. As HK moved from the elitist higher education (only 2% accessed to degree-level education in 1970s) into the rapidly-expanding higher education (nearly 70% received post-secondary education in 2010s), we bound to encounter more problems of “mismatch” and “grievance” between choices of education subjects and actual career developments throughout the tertiary education.

The provision of a “second chance” for changing career path at the early stage is desirable. In order to structure attractive HD programmes for these “not-so-happy/satisfied” AD graduates, we need to consider their opportunity cost as well. Thus, a stipend (e.g., HK\$5,000 per month) may be required for facilitating a smooth transition into a technical/professional career. This will provide a valuable choice for AD graduates, as they may have better appreciation and obtained more information about VPET. A pilot bridging-scheme, structured with more popular HD programmes, is highly recommended.

Additionally, as many SSSDP programmes have become more popular in recent years under the new funding arrangement and some programmes have not been fully taken up (a total of 3,000 degree positions in 2018/19 and the take-up rate was only about 65%), a bridging arrangement (stipend not necessary in this case) should also be considered for AD graduates (particularly for those with general degrees). A special quota could be determined for AD graduates, so that regular annual applications for popular SSSDP programmes would not be affected unfairly.

(III) Recommendation (3)--Promoting VPET in Secondary Schools Directly

According to the Consultation Document's section on "VPET in the Secondary School System" (paras. 1.5 and 1.7), "career planning and management" is fostered by "Life Planning Education" for senior secondary levels and embedded in the "Other Learning Experiences" activities. This is deemed to be inadequate and the Task Force recommended that the government should better equip secondary school teachers with knowledge about VPET (para. 2.11) and provide more relevant information to students (including junior secondary school students, para. 2.9). Furthermore, the number of school students undertaking "Applied Learning" subjects in DSE declined in recent years, from 5,188 in 2012 to 3,757 in 2018, though the percentage to total DSE candidates remained only at about 7%.

One of the major weaknesses in the promotion of VPET in schools is the unfamiliarity of VPET by teachers who are mostly university graduates. The career master appointed by many schools does not have adequate knowledge and resources to provide advices to students regarding VPET. In order to address this vital issue directly, we recommend:

- (i) the government providing additional resources to schools to support a teacher for the designated function (equivalent to at least 25% of the teaching load);
- (ii) or the government designating VTC to second "school supporting consultants" directly to schools (e.g., one consultant supporting three schools), who should work closely in collaboration with the career master of schools;
- (iii) the programme could cover all schools or just the less prestigious schools; and
- (iv) a few schools could be selected as a pilot scheme.

(IV) Recommendation (4)--Enhancing Business-School Collaborations

It is very important to expand and enhance the business-school collaboration (BSC). This will better inform and prepare high school students regarding their possible choices of selected VPET programmes as long-term career development. Employers' inputs will be very pertinent to the enhancement of such programmes.

Many types of BSC schemes have been provided by the government and other organisations over the years. Since 2005, the Education Bureau has been implementing various work-experience programmes for high school students, mainly lasting two to five days. A recent survey by the Bureau indicated that there were 86 reported programmes during June to August 2018. The top five sectors were social services, environmental services, beauty services, tourism-related and professional services. There are other programmes organised by the Employees Retraining Board and the Child Development Initiative Alliance for senior high school students. Their programmes would last from one week to two months. The main objective of these programmes is enhancing the attitude and skills of students in the working environment, rather than promoting students' awareness regarding vocational training as an alternative career path.

Furthermore, the Consultation Document by the “Task Force on Review of School Curriculum” (June 2019) highlighted that the curricula and assessments of the four core subjects at the senior secondary level should be reviewed so as to allow more flexibility and create space to cater for learner diversity (Recommendation III). There is a distinct likelihood that more time can be allocated for “Life Planning Education” and “Other Learning Experiences” in schools. The Task Force should make good use of this opportunity to seek the collaboration with the Education Bureau to design better programmes for promoting VPET in schools.

In order to promote VPET more effectively, we recommend strengthening the BSC with the following new initiative:

- (i) a new industry-based summer internship programme for F4 and F5 students should be established;
- (ii) different economic sectors having vocational training needs should set up their respective VPET promotion units, under the leadership of VTC;
- (iii) a 4- to 6-week promotion programme should be structured for every economic sector, with firms’ and respective labour unions’ participations. The content should be broad-based, aiming at providing information regarding the long-term career prospect of the industry;
- (iv) parents’ and teachers’ participations should also be arranged as a part of the programme;
- (v) such schemes should be widely publicised in schools;
- (vi) the government should provide a stipend to students and operating expenses incurred by VTC for establishing designated service centres for such schemes; and
- (vii) the programme could start with a pilot scheme for a few selected economic sectors.