

## Executive Summary

There is a strong demand for staffing in Hong Kong. According to a paper from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government, entitled “Manpower Projection”, there is an expected labour shortfall by 120,000 in 2022.

Other local surveys also show a severe labour shortage of professional and technical personnel in specific industries, especially construction and health care. This situation is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. What makes this situation even more difficult is that many young people are having difficulties in finding jobs to fit their ability and skills levels on completion of their schooling. Some have argued that this is because young people themselves are not selecting the right types of training to gain employment.

The fact of the matter is that young people in Hong Kong are not that enthusiastic about vocational education. Even those young people, who fail to get into university, prefer to look for something academically orientated, rather than seeking professional qualifications or technical skills training. This then lessens their employability prospects.

For the benefit of long-term economic development, it is necessary, therefore, for Hong Kong to make more efforts in implementing human resources training to enable young people to start preparing early for future employment and realise their full potential.

This Study focuses on Vocational Education which offers specific technical skills training to young people in order for them to obtain professional qualifications. The target group is young people aged between 14 and 25, an appropriate age to step on the professional ladder. By understanding the considerations behind their choice of education or training, along with their views on vocational education, this Study explores whether how to open up opportunities for youth employability.

The Study uses an online survey and focus groups to investigate the reasons why young people choose different types of education or training,

their views on technical opportunities and their opinions on vocational education. In addition, experts and scholars are interviewed on their assessments in developing vocational education, while also discussing the staffing requirements in Hong Kong.

Based on the findings of this Study, *Youth I.D.E.A.S.* has put forward five recommendations which focus on the incentives for organising vocational education programmes and the promotion of the Qualifications Framework (QF).

### **Key Figures of the Survey**

#### **1. Respondents generally lack confidence in the opportunities for further study offered by vocational education**

The online survey, which was conducted in June 2015, yielded 941 responses from randomly selected members of The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) aged 14-25. Only 18.2% of respondents thought that vocational education credentials received recognition in Hong Kong, while 44.8% believed that vocational education would lead to fewer opportunities for further study than would an academic education. Furthermore, 32.0% felt that vocational education was for “those who fail to enter a university or academic ‘losers’”. These results indicate that respondents generally lacked confidence in the opportunities for further study available through vocational education.

#### **2. Respondents have a negative reaction to the content, image and interest level of technical posts**

The survey also found that respondents considered “hard work” (86.2%) and “poor image of job type” (57.9%) to be the main reasons for labour shortages in technical posts. Among those who were not willing to consider roles in aircraft maintenance, elderly care or construction, most said that the main reason for this was that these posts are “not interesting/meaningful/suitable” (58.8%), followed by the view that they involve “hard work” (12.9%). This result indicates that

respondents had a negative attitude to the content of these jobs, as well as the image they presented or the levels of interest they offered. Thus, they were discouraged from pursuing such jobs or receiving the necessary vocational education required.

### **3. Respondents think vocational education can help employment**

However, more respondents agreed that their employment opportunities (better: 41.9%; worse: 15.8%) and career prospects (better: 29.0%; worse: 17.1%) would be greater with a vocational than an academic education. Moreover, 67.0% agreed that vocational education is “technically skilful” while 58.3% referred to the “professional/license exam”. This suggests that respondents did generally believe vocational education could benefit them with employability.

## **Key Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding I: Young people put excessive emphasis on going to university while overlooking the diverse range of study and training options available. They also have prejudices and misconceptions about vocational education which discourage them from choosing such programmes.**

1. **Overlooking the need for future employment.** Young people are very concerned about their further studies. They will try different and indirect pathways to achieve a university degree, even though their exam results do not meet the required standards. Though this is understandable, young people often focus on the top-up pathways and overlook the necessity for securing future employment. Once they have failed in their goal to secure a place for further academic study, they find that they have missed the chance to prepare early for employment and are not yet equipped to begin a career.
2. **Insufficient information about vocational education.** Young people in Hong Kong feel they do not have enough information

about the diverse options available to them in further education or employment, therefore limiting their ability to make appropriate choices. Some even choose their study programmes casually at the last minute based only on their exam results.

3. **Reluctance to choose vocational education.** Many young people in Hong Kong are unwilling to choose technical or vocational education courses because of their negative image. Some respondents said that vocational education is often marketed as a second choice, making them less willing to consider it.
4. **Misconceptions about the opportunities for further study.** Some respondents thought that vocational education is a “dead-end” qualification with very little chance of entering further education after completion. Nearly half of the survey respondents thought that their opportunity for further study would be worse if they pursue vocational rather than an academic education. In fact, the design of vocational education programmes now includes elements designed to prepare students for further studies in a higher-level programme. Such concerns are now misplaced and out of date.

➤ **Recommendation: Set up a “Matching Fund for Vocational Education” to encourage employers to subsidise their employees to enrol in tertiary vocational education programmes and provide opportunities for technical staff to engage in further study.**

In response to the lack of confidence in vocational education opportunities and further study, the government should consider setting up a “Matching Fund for Vocational Education” to encourage employers to subsidise their employees to undertake tertiary vocational education programmes (Qualifications Framework Levels 4 and 5<sup>1</sup>). If an employer is willing to pay part of the tuition fee, the Fund can match their contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, higher diploma and degree programmes.

- **Recommendation: Provide more information on the diversity of education and employment opportunities to secondary school students, parents and teachers.**

To deal with the problem of the lack of information about the diverse opportunities available in education and employment, the government should provide more details to students, parents and teachers alongside existing career and life planning education. Such methods may include producing videos which introduce different job types or helping students to plan for broader and non-traditional education and employment choices so as to extend their vision of the future.

- **Recommendation: The government, industrial sector and training institutes should allocate resources to enhancing the image of certain industries and promote their professionalism.**

To enhance the image of vocational education and technical posts and to improve the recognition of their professional qualities, the government should allocate resources and enter into collaboration with the industrial sector and the training institutes. This could renew the image of some of the older industries, such as machinery maintenance and primary care. It should also create new types of posts in the traditional industries in order to attract the younger generation.

**Finding II: The QF has not received enough attention from employers and its adoption and recognition is not yet widespread.**

The government launched the QF in 2008 with the aim of helping people in Hong Kong set clear goals and directions for continuous learning in order to improve their career development opportunities. However, the framework has not been widely promoted. Few employers have adopted the standard in their recruitment or promotion practices which may have affected public confidence (including that of young people in particular) in its prospects for career development. Moreover, the

development of the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) and the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism are other important elements in the implementation of the QF. Improving the application of the QF in industry would help practitioners to understand their goals and direction for continuous learning, but Hong Kong's progress is still slow in this area.

- **Recommendation: Promote the QF and speed up the development of SCS and the implementation of the RPL mechanism. Require employers to specify the QF level of jobs when they place recruitment advertisements with the Labour Department.**

Since the QF is still not generally adopted across industries, the Education Bureau should speed up the development of SCS and the implementation of the RPL mechanism. It also needs to promote the QF to more industrial and commercial enterprises so that more people know about it. Some ways to do this would be to use the QF in recruitment to government posts, and require employers to specify the QF level of jobs when they place recruitment advertisements with the Labour Department.

**Finding III: The self-financed sub-degree programmes offered by tertiary institutes tend to be academically oriented which may reduce young people's opportunities to choose vocationally oriented programmes.**

Senior secondary education in Hong Kong focuses mainly on academic content and generic skills. At a rough estimate, 35,000 school leavers every year have not yet obtained a degree. Except for some Diploma of Vocational Education and Higher Diploma graduates, most receive an academically oriented education prior to graduation. This kind of background does not help them to enter a professionally or technically based industry. Because of the higher running costs, the self-financed sub-degree programmes offered by the tertiary institutes tend to be academically oriented which may further decrease the

opportunities young people have to choose vocationally oriented programmes. Though many respondents to this study agreed that they would have better employment opportunities and career prospects if they undertook vocational education, they still hesitated over the choice.

- **Recommendation: Provide incentives for tertiary institutes to offer vocational education programmes, given the higher running costs. This should include extending the coverage of disciplines and levels of programmes subsidised by the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP).**

To encourage tertiary institutes to offer more vocational education programmes, the government should provide incentives for them to do so, given the higher running costs. This might include extending the coverage of disciplines and levels of programmes, subsidised by the SSSDP, so that more self-financed vocational education programmes can be subsidised. If the curriculum consists of 60-80% vocationally oriented courses and the programme attains level 4 or level 5 in the QF, the programme should be able to receive a fixed amount of subsidy.