

Executive Summary

There is a strong demand for staffing in Hong Kong. According to a paper on Manpower Projection produced by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government, the total labour supply in 2022 is projected to fall short of the total requirements by 120,000. Local surveys also show that there are severe labour shortages in professional and technical roles in specific industries such as construction and health care. The situation is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, many young people are finding that there are few types of work available for them to realise their potential after completing school. This is often because they have failed to take the opportunity during school to prepare for future employment by means such as selecting the right kind of training.

Young people in Hong Kong are usually not enthusiastic about vocational education. Most young people who have failed to get into university have received an academically oriented education and are not equipped with any professional qualifications or technical skills. Without either the educational credential of a degree or a specific professional or technical qualification, such young people face difficult employment prospects.

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

This study focuses on vocational education offering specific technical skills training to young people so as to help them to obtain professional qualifications. The target group is young people aged 14-25 (the right age to receive vocational education). By understanding the considerations behind their choice of education or training and their views on vocational education, this study explores whether there are measures which could open up opportunities for youth employment.

This 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 posts and their opinions on vocational education. In addition, experts and scholars are interviewed in order to understand their assessment of the development of vocational education as well as 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 is for “those who fail to enter a university/academic ‘losers’”. These results indicate that respondents generally lacked confidence in the opportunities for further study available from 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 negative reactions to the content of these jobs as well as the image they present and the level of interest they offer; this discourages them from choosing such posts or receiving vocational education that would be relevant to them.

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 better 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 can help with finding employment.

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 further study. 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 need for employment. Once they have failed in their goal to secure 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 in further education and employment so they do not know how to make an appropriate choice. 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 posts 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 had continued with vocational rather than academic education. In fact, the design of vocational education programmes now includes elements designed to prepare students for furthering their 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 expressed in the opportunities vocational education presents for 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 5¹). If an employer is willing to pay part of the tuition fee, the Fund can match their contribution.

- **Recommendation: Provide more information on the diversity of**

¹ For example, higher diploma and degree programmes.

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 collaborations with the industrial sector and the training institutes to 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 the 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. As 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 have been receiving 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.