

Executive Summary

As most students in Hong Kong prefer traditional academic education in senior secondary school years, taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) has become the single pathway for the majority of young people. According to the Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre (the Centre)'s estimation, in 2012-2015, the average number of full-time students studying programmes offered by the Vocational Training Council at levels below Higher Diploma is only eight per 100 Secondary 4 to 6 students. Besides, in 2017, nearly 65% of HKDSE students failed to meet the minimum entry requirements for places at local universities through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System.

2. The objectives of this study are to map out the best ways to develop vocational education (VE) in Hong Kong by examining the existing pathways for secondary school students, and further consider how to enhance VE so as to restore the public's confidence in VE, unleash the potential of young people, as well as cultivate talent for different industries in Hong Kong.

Study findings

3. According to this study, three main problems of VE in Hong Kong are as follows:
 - (i) Students and parents surveyed did not have sufficient understanding of VE and VE was not well recognised in society;
 - (ii) Students and parents surveyed did not have adequate knowledge of the relationship between VE and the Qualifications Framework (QF), and were uncertain about the role of VE in providing pathways; and
 - (iii) There is a mismatch between job requirements and qualifications, posing manpower challenges to the social and economic development of Hong Kong.

Policy recommendations

4. In light of the study findings, the Centre puts forward six major recommendations at three learning stages from secondary to post-secondary, which aims to offer more flexible options for young people preparing for further studies and employment.

Junior Secondary Education

Recommendation 1: Introducing 'Junior Job Tasting Programme (JJTP)' to broaden the horizon of young people

5. The Centre proposes introducing JJTP to Secondary 3 students. This programme aims to expose students to VE at an early stage, helping them better understand various workplaces and education pathways, as well as deepening parents' and students' understanding of VE and QF.

Senior Secondary Education

Recommendation 2: Extending the Applied Learning (ApL) courses from two years to three years to develop students' core competence and enhance the recognition of ApL

6. The Centre recommends introducing an optional one-year work experience programme on top of the current two-year ApL curriculum. The work experience programme provides opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with work environment, and experience possible scenarios in the workplace to enhance the professional skills of students and the recognition of ApL courses. Moreover, the Centre suggests all ApL courses to be accredited to QF Level 3 to increase the confidence of students, parents and employers in ApL.

Recommendation 3: Refining the grading system in reporting results of ApL courses to strengthen the role of ApL on the education pathway and the incentive for students taking ApL courses

7. Currently, the highest attainment in ApL courses is comparable to Level 3 (Level 4 from 2018) in category A subjects in HKDSE. To better recognise the benefits of ApL courses to students applying for places at universities, the grading system should be refined by making references to other elective subjects. The Centre recommends the Government should collaborate with tertiary institutions, and encourage them to make admission offers in favour of students who have taken relevant ApL courses. In addition, high achievers in the APL courses can be exempted from taking relevant modules offered by tertiary institutions. This can help enhance the credibility of ApL courses in pursuing further studies.

Recommendation 4: Establishing Hong Kong iLab School to nurture innovation and technology (IT) talent for future needs

8. To nurture talent that meet the surging demand for IT professionals and development of various industries in Hong Kong, the Centre suggests establishing the iLab School — the first senior secondary school under the Direct Subsidy Scheme focusing on STEM education while maintaining the elements of New Senior Secondary curriculum. The mission of the iLab School is to equip students with creative and innovative mindsets, as well as collaboration, communication and problem-solving skills that are essential in the 21st century, hence laying the groundwork for students by integrating multiple subjects in different areas. The proposed curriculum design and training programmes for teachers are expected to better tie in the needs of the industry through the provision of experiential learning and applied/practical skills training. Upon completing the 3-year double diploma courses, graduates will be awarded the Diploma of Secondary Education and the Diploma in Innovation and Technology, which can meet both their further education and career needs.

Tertiary Education

Recommendation 5: Promoting a mechanism of mutual credit recognition amongst tertiary institutions to facilitate the acquisition of professional knowledge and practical skills for young people

9. Mechanisms to facilitate credit transfer across academic and career-oriented institutions can be improved by developing a platform to collectively share information and allowing students in academic-oriented education to take vocational training courses, and vice versa. Consequently, it can enhance the recognition of VE and equip post-secondary students taking different courses with academic knowledge and practical skills.

Recommendation 6: Recognising Prior Learning as the entry requirement for universities to create more articulation opportunities to higher education

10. The Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism under the QF can be extended to include more industries; the highest QF level for the recognition of qualifications can be progressed from Level 4 (higher diploma and sub-degree

levels) to Level 5 (degree level). Besides, the Centre suggests encouraging tertiary institutions to validate previous work experience as one of the entry requirements and reserve some tertiary education places for young employees, with a view to minimising the overemphasis on earning a degree before joining the workforce in the long run.

Measures to provide more comprehensive support

11. To further promote VE, the Centre recommends the Government to provide more comprehensive support with additional measures, including (i) formulating a set of criteria for assessing the efficacy of VE to enhance its recognition, and stepping up efforts to promote 'Vocational and Professional Education and Training' to enhance the public awareness and the use of QF; (ii) advancing the professional development of teaching staff, as well as strengthening the roles of business communities and trade unions to promote the professionalism in VE; (iii) reinforcing the support and coordination between government departments with respect to VE planning; and (iv) building collaboration among the Government, education sector, business sector and Non-Governmental Organisations.

Concluding remarks

12. Education is the cornerstone of nurturing talent for society. Every young individual has his/her merits, but the existing academic-oriented education system cannot effectively cater for the needs of every young individual. The Centre believes that an ideal VE will enable young individuals to pursue their goals through providing multiple pathways for them, and ultimately, enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong.