

WOMEN's COMMISSION

Initiatives to Promote Continuing Education in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper outlines the key initiatives launched under the purview of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to promote and support continuing education in Hong Kong.

Background

2. To maintain the competitiveness of our workforce in an increasingly globalised economy, it is important that our workers constantly upgrade their skills and broaden their knowledge. In recent years, the Government has actively promoted the concept of lifelong learning and launched or supported a wide range of education and training schemes/programmes aiming at enhancing the skills level, employability and competitiveness of our workforce. The vast majority of these programmes are open to applicants irrespective of their age, gender and race, while some are tailor-made for women participants. The ensuing paragraphs set out the various schemes and programmes launched under EMB's purview.

Key Initiatives

A. Vocational education and training

3. Established in 1982, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has been offering a very comprehensive range of vocational education, industrial training and skills upgrading to school leavers and adult

learners to prepare them for employment or to enhance their employability. Admission to VTC courses are solely based on the level of education, aptitude and interest of the applicants, irrespective of their age, gender and race. The following sets out the main types of vocational education and training programmes offered by VTC for people in employment:

- (a) Through its Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) and School of Business and Information Systems (SBI), the VTC offers **part-time higher diploma/ diploma/ higher certificate/ certificate** programmes in nine disciplines of studies to in-service workers who wish to attain higher academic/vocational qualifications. The nine disciplines range from engineering, applied science, design, information technology to hotel and tourism. Of the 23 350 places offered by VTC in the 2004-05 academic year, about 26% were taken up by female; and about 26 600 part-time places have been planned for 2005-06. For some disciplines such as business administration, child education & community services, applied science, design and hospitality, more than 50% of the enrolled students are females.
- (b) **Training and skills upgrading courses** of different duration are offered by the VTC's 15 Training and Development (T&D) Centres to in-service personnel to upgrade their skills and knowledge of their respective trades. Of the 41 150 trainee places offered in 2004-05, about 25% were taken up by female trainees; and about 44 500 trainee places have been planned for 2005-06.
- (c) The VTC's Institute of Professional Education and Knowledge (PEAK) provides a comprehensive range of **continuous professional development programmes** for the working population mainly in the area of financial services, management and information technology. Operated mostly on a self-financed basis, these programmes include industry-specific and technical skills short training courses, professional licensing examinations, skills assessment tests, preparatory courses for professional examinations and professional certificates and diplomas with

professional and academic articulation paths. Female trainees take up over 50% of the about 31,000 places offered each year.

B. Retraining for the unemployed and displaced workers

4. The Employees Retraining Scheme (ERS) provides retraining courses and services to eligible employees to help them acquire new or enhanced skills in order to adjust to economic restructuring and re-enter the labour market. The Scheme is targeted at displaced workers who are aged 30 and above with no more than junior secondary education. Since its inception in 1992, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has provided retraining for over 940 000 retrainees, of whom some 76% are women.

5. The ERB offers both full-time placement-tied skills courses in a wide range of industries to train up the unemployed back to work as well as part-time general skills courses to enhance their employability. Each year, over 100 000 retraining places (about half are full-time placement-tied courses) are provided by ERB. Apart from skills training, the ERB also provides placement follow-up services to help the graduates of full-time or placement-tied courses to find jobs, with an average placement rate of some 80% over the past few years.

6. The retraining courses are very well received by female participants as evidenced by their high participation rate, especially in domestic helpers and personal care workers training courses. As a whole, the ERS has helped a substantial number of woman retrainees to become economically active or to sustain their employability.

C. Continuing Education

(a) *Continuing Education Fund (CEF)*

7. The Government launched a \$5 billion CEF in 2002 to provide financial incentives to those eligible applicants aged from 18 to 60 to pursue continuing education so as to better prepare Hong Kong's workforce for the knowledge-based economy. CEF applicants may

claim reimbursement of 80% of the course fee upon completion of the course, subject to a ceiling of \$10,000 per applicant. At present, more than 4,900 approved courses in five economic sectors with high-growth potential (i.e. logistics, financial services, business services, tourism and creative industries) and three types of generic skills (i.e. language, design and interpersonal/intrapersonal skills for the workplace) are covered by the CEF. According to a recent survey, some 73% of the applicants considered the Fund useful in arousing their interests in continuing education, and more than 70% of them thought that the CEF courses were helpful in enhancing their vocational skills and self-confidence.

8. Of the over 260 000 applications received by end May 2006, about 60% are female. It is noted that they are usually interested in taking courses related to business services, tourism and language domain.

(b) Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS)

9. The \$400 million Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS) was launched in September 2001 to help low skill and low education workers to adapt to the changing economic environment. The Scheme currently covers 23 industries and has so far offered about 7 700 classes benefitting over 156 000 in-service workers. According to surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004, 92% of the trainees considered the SUS courses helpful in enhancing their vocational skills and 88% of them considered the Scheme has helped improve their self-confidence.

10. Admission to SUS courses is regardless of age, gender and race. There are generally more female trainees enrolling in courses dedicated to beauty care, elderly care, import/export, clothing and textile, real estate agent and tourism. They accounted for over 65% of all SUS participants.

(c) Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS)

11. The Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) was introduced in 1980 to subsidise non-governmental organisations to organise short and informal adult education programmes under particular purviews such as courses for improving basic literacy in Chinese; general education

courses; retirement education courses; special education courses for the physically or mentally handicapped adults, etc. In the 2005/06 school year, there are 105 NGOs receiving subvention under the Scheme for organising 862 informal adult education programmes providing at least 19 500 places. There are also a few programmes specially designed for women under AESS including Basic Putonghua Course for Women, Stress Management Course for Women, Basic Computer Course for Women and Adjustment Course for New Arrival Women. In 2004/05, about 80% (18 000) of the 22 600 participants in AESS programmes were female (about 3 100 of them joined programmes specifically organized for women).

D. Qualifications framework

12. To turn Hong Kong into a lifelong learning society, our education and qualification systems must provide multiple progression pathways and articulation of academic and vocational qualifications. With this objective in mind, we are developing a Qualifications Framework (QF), which is a seven-level hierarchy against which academic, vocational and continuing education qualifications can be benchmarked.

13. To ensure the relevance of the training programmes in the vocational sector, EMB is setting up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) for individual industries to develop industry-specific competency standards under the QF. So far, ITACs have been formed for eleven industries, namely, Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Beauty and Logistics. More ITACs will be established in order to cover the bulk of our workforce.

14. With well-defined standards of qualifications and clear indication of the articulation ladders between them, the QF enables all learners to set clear goals and directions for obtaining quality-assured qualifications. In the long run, the QF will promote lifelong learning, hence enhancing the capability and competitiveness of Hong Kong's human capital.

Conclusion

15. The Government is committed to promoting and supporting life-long learning and continued education in Hong Kong through providing a very comprehensive range of vocational education, training/retraining and continuing education programmes as described above. It must be emphasized that all such programmes are designed in a gender neutral manner and offered equal access and opportunities to all eligible applicants, regardless of gender. Indeed, some of the programmes are tailor-made for female participants and women have higher enrolment rates in many of the courses.

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