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Mr Lee Chung Sin, Esmond, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1) - Further and Higher Education Branch,
Further Education Division,
Education Bureau,
7/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

Dear Mr Lee,

Review of Sub-degree Education

Thank you for inviting the Employers' Federation of Hong Kong to comment on the Review of Sub-degree Education ("Review") released in July 2022.

Manpower is the most vital resource for services economies like Hong Kong and our education system is the fertile ground for incubating local talents to meet the job market needs. As employers, we are concerned with the quality and diversity of our potential workforce, in order to avoid a mismatch with the need and development of the future society. In technological and many other areas, there is a shortage in the supply of skills as well as manpower, and Hong Kong already has to catch up with other jurisdictions. The Federation therefore appreciates the Bureau's initiative to review the Sub-degree Education, which is an important stage for young people to map their personal and career development.

A sharper differentiation between Associate Degree and High Diploma

Hong Kong, being a world city, needs a diverse spectrum of skillsets for different industries and job functions. Owing to various reasons, unfortunately, mainstream academic-focused education overshadows the equally important technical, vocational and professional training for our workforce. There is proliferation of sub-degree education, leading to student disappointment in articulation; Associate Degree (AD) is often considered as the second choice

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for low achievers. Due to the lack of an applied science university as an attractive degree-level destination, there is inadequate development of applied learning at secondary school level, and not enough students have been attracted to Higher Diploma (HD) that is aligned with the needs of industries and job functions. Against this background, we are facing a serious problem of skills mismatch, and shortage of engineers and other professionals as well as manpower in skilled trades.

The sharper differentiation between AD and HD will allow a clearer identity for two streams of education – generic education, and the vocational and professional education & training (VPET) pathway with separate training objectives for a diverse working population. Concerted continuous efforts and time are needed to achieve this paradigm shift; but the Review will be a start for balancing our education system.

Element of industry experience in HD

Elements of practicum and industry knowledge are extremely important in HD curriculum, and these should be positioned as a main pillar in the VPET pathway. As mentioned in the Review, multiple entry and exit points should be provided to allow students employment and articulation opportunities to strengthen the work-integration learning component. A longer study duration than the typical two years for HD can facilitate multiple entry and exit points; this can also encourage the development of Recognition of Prior Learning and Workplace Learning, enabling students with less than 22222 in HKDSE results to better map their personal and career development on leaving school. We look forward to a closer collaboration between HD providers and industry partners at different stages to assure the quality and relevancy on the delivery of HD education.

Prerequisite skills for graduates

Concurrently, the Federation is of the view that both sub-degree education, HD in particular should provide extended training on prerequisite skills, to enhance the “preparedness” of graduates for entering the workforce. While possessing the necessary knowledge is important, “survivor skills” and “calibre” are what graduates need to grow in the workplace.

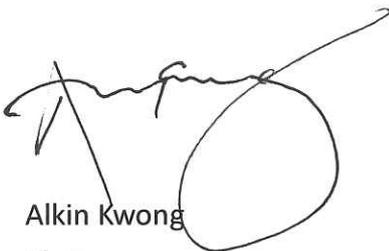
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Such prerequisite skills include proficiency in languages, strong interpersonal and communications skills, right mindset and manner, analytical skills, ability to combat pressures, etc. In addition to formal lecturing, these skills could be acquired through extra-curricular activities such as group project, job attachment, corporate activities, etc. An arrangement similar to the business-school partnership currently co-ordinated by the Education Bureau at secondary school could be considered.

With such soft as well as hard skillsets, sub-degree graduates will be better positioned and recognised by the employers and peers, by demonstrating a shortened learning curve in the workplace.

It is a shared responsibility to provide our next generation with a visionary and sustainable education system that facilitates the establishment of personal goal and career aspiration, as well as motivates contribution back to society. The Federation is always ready to help and work with the Government as appropriate. Please feel free to contact our Federation office should any assistance be required in this area.

Yours sincerely,



Alkin Kwong
Chairman