

**Continuing Development and
Employment Opportunities for Youth**

Concise Report

Commission on Youth

March 2003

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I Introduction

- In his inaugural speech on 1.7.2002, CE asked the Commission on Youth (COY) to come up with a plan within six months to provide young people with pluralistic options in training and employment.
- COY decided to tackle the assignment from multiple angles, which include assessing the size and nature of the issue, the needs of non-engaged youth (NEY), stocktaking existing training and employment opportunities within government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), analyzing youth unemployment, attempting a conceptual framework for future actions, setting goals in providing more development and employment opportunities for NEY, searching for pilot projects to test the feasibility of the conceptual framework and making recommendations accordingly.

II Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of NEY

- NEY refers to economically inactive young people who are not pursuing any studies.
- The Commission believes that there are more than 94,100 NEY looking for opportunities for further education, vocational/on-job training or employment in Hong Kong.
- Statistics provided by the Census and Statistics Department show that –
 - (a) unemployment rates among younger adolescents (15 – 19) have been consistently higher than the older ones (20 – 24);
 - (b) the male to female ratios of NEY were much higher than those of the whole population in the corresponding age groups;
 - (c) educational attainment of NEY was lower than that of the same age group in the population;
 - (d) there is no evidence to suggest that newly arrived persons constitute a more major proportion of the NEY in Hong Kong;
 - (e) the proportion of NEY was relatively higher at Yuen Long, Tin Shui Wai, Northern New Territories and Tai Po;
 - (f) among the households with NEY, 17.9% were with one parent;
 - (g) youth unemployment was more pronounced in families with relatively

- lower household income; and
- (h) NEY are more likely to be associated with the lower class.

III Needs Assessment

- The Commission considers it necessary to conduct a research study to assess the needs of NEY in Hong Kong. Professor Joseph Lau of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Dr Howard Cheng of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University were invited to conduct a study in September 2002 to examine the psychological and behavioural problems that may be associated with youth unemployment, the coping skills and support mechanisms to deal with them and the values of the NEY and their expectations of new programmes that are being offered to these youths. The final report is expected to complete around March 2003.

IV Existing Education, Pre-employment Training, On-job Training and Employment Opportunities for NEY

- Starting from September 2002, adequate subsidized Secondary 4 or training places are provided for all Secondary 3 students studying in publicly funded schools who have the wish and ability to progress.
- Young people may enroll in Project Yi Jin and Associate Degree programmes.
- The Vocational Training Council provides pre-employment vocational education to Secondary 3 leavers, Secondary 5 and 7 graduates respectively.
- The Labour Department runs the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and the Youth Work Experience & Training Scheme in providing training for young people before they enter the labour market. NGOs have also offered training opportunities for NEY.
- Existing employment opportunities for NEY include special job attachment, employment start-up and enhanced employment programmes/projects, programme assistants and peer councillors provided by NGOs and co-ordinated by the Social Welfare Department. There are also part-time staff posts for recreation & sports activities and public libraries run by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

- All the existing programmes combined still fail to meet the needs of the NEY. The Commission is not able to conduct a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the employment programmes. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to note that much effort has been devoted in meeting the needs of the NEY.

V Youth Unemployment and Conceptual Framework for Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for NEY

- The Commission considers it necessary to find solutions for NEY on the basis of a solid conceptual framework, to design a mechanism for execution and to monitor the outcome of the relevant action plans. An analysis on the problem of youth employment is made from the education, economic, family and global perspectives.
- *Education Perspective* - The 9-year compulsory education have not equipped the youth with the basic competence expected by the society as NEY who have finished Secondary 5 are identified as academically unqualified for employment. The education system in Hong Kong is still screening students and depriving some of them of further opportunity for learning, thus aggravating the problem of youth unemployment.
- Language learning should be given top priority in all learning endeavours. There is an urgent cry to follow through the education reform, recognizing that every child should be holistically equipped for family, work and community lives, bearing in mind that they may have different strengths and weaknesses.
- *Economic Perspective* - Hong Kong is developing into a knowledge economy providing high value-added services. The number of low-end jobs generated is however inadequate to absorb the NEY. The 2001 census shows that 35.1% of the labour force had an education equivalent to just Secondary 3 or below. The education profile is not conducive to the development of a knowledge-based economy.
- Employment in the Mainland will be an inevitable trend for low-skilled workers in Hong Kong in the short term. But in the longer term the Mainland will demand middle or high level professionals. At present job seekers from Hong Kong have a leading edge in English which is to their advantage in service fields.

It is pertinent to note that nowadays youths in Hong Kong are unwilling to take up manufacturing jobs which are monotonous in nature. Creative industries and sports can be doorways to help NEY.

- Manpower mismatch is the biggest issue confronting Hong Kong's economic restructuring and it can only be redressed through upgrading the calibre of its human capital.
- *Family Perspective* – Great diversities exist in the parents of NEY and these include parenting styles, attitude and values, personal circumstances such as chronic physical, mental, social and economic problems. There are also significant differences between fathers and mothers in their attitude, knowledge, skills and relationship with their children.
- To connect their children from school to work and other developments, parents have to give material and emotional support. They need to be role models and stimulators, to be resourceful in identifying and securing work or training opportunities for them and to upkeep morale and hope in the family.
- To facilitate parents to perform these roles, it is necessary to recognize and entertain their needs, viz., reassurance on the security and prospect of occupational engagement for their children, information on development opportunities, attitude tuning in maintaining a positive outlook, communication skills in negotiation, conflict management and problem solving with their adolescent children and emotional support through self-help groups in buffering their emotions and creating the synergy in overcoming disappointment and distress.
- *Global Perspective* – The 2001 International Labour Organisation estimate shows that more than 70 million young people (aged between 15 to 24) are unemployed. The issue of youth unemployment and underemployment is a global phenomenon. During periods of economic recession, young people are more easily being made redundant because of their relatively lower experience and skills.
- The issue of youth unemployment was taken with a high degree of concern by the United Nations. A High Level Policy Network on Youth Employment was convened in July 2001. Among other things, the panel advocated “four top Priorities for all national Actions Plans”, viz., employability, equal opportunities,

entrepreneurship and employment creation.

- Specific youth employment policies should thus be integrated into a comprehensive employment strategy. Youth unemployment should be treated as part of a wider macroeconomic policy that can expand overall employment opportunities involving education, training, enterprise development and social policies. This approach would avoid switching unemployment between different age groups and broaden the impact beyond specific sectors.
- Young people should be included in policy formulation and development and they need to be better trained, hence life long learning should be the basis to ensure that they retain a competitive edge.
- *Conceptual Framework* – The framework suggested to tackle the issue of NEY includes the following –
 - (a) enhancement of human capital through trainings, to be outcome-focused and market oriented, in multiple channels;
 - (b) strengthening social capital by improving family cohesiveness and the connectedness of young people with schools and the community;
 - (c) rebuilding cultural capital by strengthening cultural education in schools and the community;
 - (d) multiple intelligence: broad base formal education and vocational training through expanding the curricula of education beyond linguistic and logic-arithmetic intelligences and to develop an assessment and accreditation mechanism for education and training;
 - (e) restructuring the local labour market by job creation in the sectors of sports, recreation, arts, culture, tourism and creative industries;
 - (f) integration with other economies;
 - (g) life-long learning through on-job training;
 - (h) meaning engagement for NEY through counseling and informal training; and
 - (i) cross-sector and cross-department collaboration in re-engaging NEY in a meaningful and productive manner.

VI The Way Forward

- *Clear Goal Setting* - The following goals are proposed in resolving the problem of NEY in Hong Kong, viz. –

- (a) to create opportunities for them to receive education to suit their aptitude;
 - (b) to develop the skills and knowledge needed for work, to increase work opportunities for them locally;
 - (c) to explore such opportunities in the Mainland and overseas;
 - (d) to help them respond to the changing nature of work and address learning or working barriers; and
 - (e) to engage them meaningfully and to prevent them from involvement in risk behaviours.
- *Meaningful Engagement for Unmotivated NEY* – The Commission proposes that some schemes be devised and implemented by social workers to engage the NEY meaningfully.
- A total of 9 schemes are outlined as follows –
 - (a) “Training Programme for Unmotivated NEY with Low Education Attainment” by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service;
 - (b) “All Night Drop-in Centre” by the Youth Outreach;
 - (c) “Youth Employment Start-up Programme” by the Youth Outreach;
 - (d) “Modern Apprenticeship” by the Breakthrough Ltd.;
 - (e) “Leadership Programme for Potential Jobless School Leavers” by the Breakthrough Ltd.;
 - (f) “The Hong Kong Award for Young People” by the Hong Kong Youth Award Scheme;
 - (g) “Church Concern for the Unemployed” by the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement;
 - (h) “Voluntary Work: Building the Foundation for Future Employment” by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups; and
 - (j) “Career Development: Building the Foundation for Future Employment” by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups.
- *Building an Integrated Co-ordination and Monitoring Mechanism* through the following 3 approaches –
 - (a) to develop an integrated, outcome-based framework for the “Youth Employment Strategy” among government, NGOs and the private sector: a consistent case management process is to be adopted to screen and provide youth with assessment, counseling and referral services; a

- computerized information system with information on education, training and employment is to be developed; and to provide the relevant information via the internet. Removal of the age limit imposed on the Employees Retraining Board and to change the term “retraining to “training” are being suggested for consideration;
- (b) to develop an assessment and accreditation mechanism for vocational training : a “qualifications framework (QF)” and associated quality assurance mechanism are required to provide the foundation to determine the competency level of training courses; and
 - (c) to set up a suitable mechanism to oversee the continuing development and employment opportunities for NEY :
 - (i) A dedicated COY task force to monitor the implementation of and progress on the recommendations and proposals in the report and tender its advice to the Government. Relevant parties will be co-opted as members as appropriate.
 - (ii) The Secretary for Home Affairs will take up the role of co-ordinating the efforts of relevant Government bureaux and departments in the implementation of the recommendations in the report.
- *Sectors with Potential for Job Creation* – The following pilot projects in the fields of sports, arts & culture and creative industries are proposed –
 - (a) “Sports Career Development Project for Youth”: by Hong Kong Coaching Committee and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to provide coach training for youths who are interested in pursuing a career in sports;
 - (b) “Sports Instructor Trainee Programme and Full-Time Instructors for School Outreach Coaching Programme” by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department;
 - (c) “Mini-Tennis Instructors Scheme” by the Hong Kong Tennis Association;
 - (d) “HKLSS Special Employment Opportunities Scheme” by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society;
 - (e) “The Arts and Creative Industries” programme organized by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Labour Department;
 - (f) “Cultural Projects on Creative Use of Public Space” by the Breakthrough Ltd.;
 - (g) “Animation of McDull and McMug” by Samuel Choy and Bliss Concepts Ltd.; and

- (h) “Daydreamer Cartoon Co-op Studio” by Daydreamer Cartoon Academy Ltd.
- Relative to the projects in creative industries, the following proposals have been put forth:
 - (a) Players of the creative industries in Hong Kong are mostly small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They need business information, network with market players and copyright protection outside Hong Kong etc. and hence the Government may consider offering assistance to them.
 - (b) At present many industrial buildings are vacant and the Government can draft policies and regulation to modify these buildings to be used for development of creative industries.
 - (c) The Government to fund the initiative of the “Daydreamer Cartoon Co-op Studio” by providing accommodation and capital costs for the running of the studio with a view to making it self-financed in 5 years.
 - Information technology is a platform to develop training and employment opportunities for the NEY.
 - It is proposed that Government should re-examine the policies on manufacturing industries which can provide more training and employment opportunities for the NEY.
 - The Commission notes that some industrial and community organizations have started launching employment training/attachment programmes in the Mainland for the youth. In implementing the programmes, it is recommended that the organizers should -
 - (a) look for youth who are motivated;
 - (b) assign mentors to guide the trainees during their training in the Mainland;
 - (c) make arrangements for follow up services on their return to Hong Kong;
 - (d) provide through NGOs job-related counseling and services to them; and
 - (e) conduct an evaluation of the project.

VII Conclusion

The following recommendations are put forth by the Commission –

For Government

1. To set up a mechanism to co-ordinate efforts on providing continuing development and employment for NEY;
2. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund and the Continuing Education Fund should be funding sources for projects on the meaningful engagement of NEY;
3. To set up a Research and Development Fund (probably supported by the Lotteries Fund) for new initiatives and pilot projects for NEY;
4. To give priority to services in the meaningful engagement of NEY, education & supporting services for their families and enhancing vocational education and counseling for them;
5. To refocus the assessment and accreditation mechanism for formal education and vocational training;
6. To provide multiple tracks of education and training for all youth;
7. To enhance on-job training schemes and develop an outcome-based training mechanism;
8. To formulate policies and provide resources for developing sectors with potential for job creation, viz., creative industries, sports, arts& culture, recreation and environment;
9. To explore training and employments for NEY in the Mainland and overseas; and
10. To consider restructuring and expanding the Employee Retraining Board to cover the needs of NEY and to develop an integrated, outcome-based framework to execute and monitor the various programmes.

For Private Sector

1. To provide on-job training opportunities for NEY;
2. To set up a special fund to assist in training young people for creative industries; and
3. To start pilot projects in the Mainland and overseas for on-job training of NEY.

For Parents

Parental guidance should be based on multiple intelligences and the vocational aptitude of young people. Parents should not hesitate to seek help when their

children face difficulties in learning and work.

For Educators and Youth Workers

1. To work closely with parents in giving career guidance and vocational counseling
2. To reposition and equip themselves to respond to new challenges in counseling, prevention of risk behaviours, rehabilitation of youth at risk, working with at-risk families and design & execution of outcome focused programmes, with tested outcome measures; and
3. NGOs should re-examine and re-prioritise their services to address the changing needs of youth and NEY in particular.

For Youth

1. To be open to vocational training
2. To pursue mobility and cross-cultural ventures in the Mainland and overseas; and
3. To participate in community services through volunteer work.

Acknowledgement

The Commission on Youth would like to thank the following parties for their contribution to the report-

Professor Cheng Kai-ming, the University of Hong Kong

Ms Ho Kim-fai, Commission on Youth

Ms Scarlett Pong Oi-lan, Commission on Youth

Professor Joseph Lau, Centre for Clinical Trials and Epidemiological Research, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Lee Kam-hon, Department of Marketing, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Liu Pak-wai, Department of Economics, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Daniel T L Shek, Department of Social Work, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Dr Sandra Tsang Kit-man, Committee on Home-School Cooperation

Dr William Wong, Consultant from Alberta, Canada

Dr Rosanna Wong Yick-ming, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

Mr Gabriel Yu, iTVentures Ltd

Mr Kevin Lau, Vice President, Hong Kong Watch Manufactures Association Ltd
Breakthrough Ltd.

Daydreamer Cartoon Academy Ltd.

The Hong Kong Arts Development Council

The Hong Kong Award for Young People

Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

The Hong Kong Life Saving Society

Hong Kong Tennis Association

Youth Outreach

Census & Statistics Department

Labour Department

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Social Welfare Department

Economic Development and Labour Bureau

Education and Manpower Bureau

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Home Affairs Bureau