



**“Zurich Meets Hong Kong”
Skills for Success Seminar
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VPET Model in Hong Kong

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon! I am delighted to be here today to speak at the “Skills for Success” seminar. People always want to know the secret of success. The reality is there are no silver bullets. Ultimately, the relevant skills (both “hard” and “soft” skills) are the core ingredients for success in today’s evolving world and economy. Skills open up the potential for employability, equipping people and economies with the potential to grow and embrace new opportunities. The fundamental objective of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) is to enable students to acquire the relevant skills. In Hong Kong, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) is the largest VPET provider with approximately 250,000 students and trainees each year, including 50,000 full time students.

I took up my present role as the Executive Director of VTC back in 2013. When I first started, I sought to familiarise myself with Hong Kong’s education system, but try as I might, I was unable to find a diagram showing a full Hong Kong’s education system with both traditional academic and vocational routes.

International Congress on VPET in Winterthur

In September 2014, I attended the International Congress on VPET in Winterthur. Throughout the Congress, what impressed me most was that the Swiss speakers always showed the same diagram when they talked about the

Swiss education system illustrating the academic route vis-a-vis the vocational route. During the tour, I also visited SwissSkills held at Bern where I noticed the same diagram appearing across different places, at exhibition booths, posters and even on the floor.

Lesson Learned from Swiss Tour

By the end of the tour, I gained a better understanding about the Swiss education model. As you can see in this Swiss model, both VET and PET use clearly defined curriculums and national qualification procedures. They are also characterised by a high degree of permeability. Between the academic and vocational sides, one of the most impressive features, is the number of crosswalks and points of transfer between the two sides. It is possible for learners to pursue additional training opportunities and change the course of their professional lives with ease. The Swiss VET/PET system offers a broad range of available training options. Courses cater to different study interests and abilities are geared to the needs of different age groups.

Students can start with a three- or four-year apprenticeship and decide to pursue either simultaneously, or with an additional year of study, a more applied version of the academic baccalaureate, i.e. the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB). This diploma entitles students to admission to a University of Applied Sciences (UAS), where students can earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Success Factors of Swiss Dual-track Model

Taking a closer look at the Swiss system, the success of its education model lies in (1) the close correlation that the education model bears with the labour market (due to the fact that the course content and training methods are jointly designed by industry participants and vocational training centres); (2) the high quality of programmes (industry driven and market relevant); (3) the high degree of permeability; and (4) the public-private partnership (whereby the private and public sector cooperate closely not only in the identification, preparation, delivery, assessment of skills training, but also in providing practical workplace training).

The Swiss education system successfully promotes youth employment. Young professionals finishing their apprenticeship will have an entry ticket to

the labour market as well as access to further education, thus making the Swiss VET system very attractive.

Given these two choices, (i.e. VET vs traditional academic route), it shouldn't surprise us that over 60% of young Swiss take the vocational route, and only about 25% the academic path in upper secondary education.¹ According to the report across OECD countries, on average, 35% of 15-19 year-olds were enrolled in general upper secondary education programmes. Comparing this to Hong Kong, currently less than 5% of the Secondary 3 graduates join VPET while the rest continue with the academic education.

Swiss education system also enables the country to maintain a low youth unemployment rate. In 2016, the youth unemployment rate in Switzerland was 8.6% (below the OECD average of 13% for persons aged 15-24; In Hong Kong, the unemployment rate of youth aged 15-19 and 20-29 was 13.8% and 5.9% respectively)².

Upon my return to Hong Kong from Winterthur, the VTC embarked on a number of new initiatives to promote VPET and dual-track approach in Hong Kong. The launch of VTC Earn & Learn Scheme is the first one among these initiatives.

VTC Earn & Learn Scheme

The success of VTC Earn & Learn Scheme launched since 2014 benefitted over 2,000 student speaks for itself. The scheme provides participants with an opportunity to "earn and learn" and to pursue a well-defined progression pathway for higher qualifications.

By integrating structured classroom learning with on-the-job training, young people can put learning into practice in the real work setting. With the positive feedback, the scheme has already been extended to cover 10 industries and trades. We are planning to further develop the dual-track model to Degree level, ultimately achieving the goal of dual-track learning for all.

¹ [Source: NCEE. (2015) *Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training*]

² [Source: OECD Date: <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/youth-unemployment-rate.htm>; Census: *The Profile of the Unemployed Population in Hong Kong in 2016*]

An Overview of Hong Kong Education System

We now also has our Hong Kong diagram clearly outlining the two routes – general education (or traditional academic) and vocational education. General education goes from secondary school to higher education while the vocational education route goes from secondary school to VPET tertiary institutes. Students who meet the entry requirements of universities can enroll at the traditional universities or UGC-funded universities to do a four year Bachelor Degree programme.

This year, some 52,000 students sit the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) exam, an annual territory-wide examination for secondary 6 students. As a reference, around 13,000 secondary 6 graduates has enrolled to VTC programmes from diploma to degree levels studying at IVE and THEi campuses. This figure is largely comparable to the admission to the eight other publicly-funded universities added together.

Current Situation on Permeability

Here, I also wish to point out that Hong Kong's VPET system is permeable to a large extent but not entirely. Let's take our students of Diploma of Vocational Education (DVE) who study at our Youth College campuses as an example. If they wish to progress and get a bachelor's degree, they can only do so by taking up a Higher Diploma course for 2 years at IVE first before they can articulate to top-up degree programmes offered by local or overseas universities.

Therefore the current permeability situation has scope to improve to provide more choices to VTC Diploma students to articulate to a degree awarding higher education institute direct rather than confine to 'Higher Diploma at IVE first' route model.

Bridging the Gap with Vocational Baccalaureate

What Hong Kong lacks is a "Vocational Baccalaureate" like that in the Swiss system. We have plans to soon launch a 3-year Vocational Baccalaureate (VB) programme for students at senior secondary level enabling students to articulate straight to university of applied sciences equivalent type of

higher education institutes or traditional academic universities. Only by so doing could we hope to achieve comprehensiveness in articulation and permeability.

Traditional education is not a straightjacket that fits all young people as everyone has his or her own interests and abilities. I believe that VB programmes will offer students who are less academically-oriented but good at “hands on” subject areas and skills with a valuable alternative, allowing them to have an international currency to be admitted to local and overseas higher education institutions.

Nurturing 21st Century Core Competencies

As we move further into the 21st century, we are facing accelerating globalisation. Educators, students, industry players – no one can afford to stand still. As educators, our role is to equip students with the knowledge and skillsets for the global workforce of today and tomorrow. It is our mission to help school leavers and working adults to acquire values, knowledge and skills for lifelong learning and pave their way for success.

In doing so, we have devoted significant efforts in enhancing our offerings and promoting internationalisation, so as to nurture students' all round development.

International Exposure

To enable young people to showcase their talents in a multicultural society and in a globalised world, we emphasize the nurturing of inter-cultural networking skills. We provide our students with plenty of opportunities to study abroad and participate in exchange programmes. Through our global partner network, every year some 8,000 VTC students take part in various international programmes such as study tours, exchange programmes, overseas industry attachments and many more.

Inter-disciplinary initiatives

We are moving in the direction of refining our curriculum on an inter-disciplinary basis. Let me use one example to illustrate how we bring our engineering students to work with design students.

Our students participated in World Solar Challenge 2017 with SOPHIE VI earlier this month. SOPHIE is a futuristic eco-friendly solar-powered car initially developed by a group of our IVE Engineering students and teachers. Over the years, the engineering students kept refining and upgrading the functions, effectiveness, efficiency of SOPHIE, and it is now in its sixth generation. With an enhanced design created by our HKDI graduate we have brought together cross-disciplinary perspectives and expertise in engineering and design. SOPHIE VI is much lighter than its previous edition and conserves more electricity. We came fourth in the recent World Solar Challenge competition after crossing 3,000 km of desert land.

Embrace New Technology into Teaching and Learning

VTC will continue to push forward for new innovations. We continue to build new facilities to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Last year, we established STEM Education Centers in different campuses to create simulated learning contexts and facilitate students' co-creation in projects, integrating modern technology with innovative ideas.

We also embrace Building Information Modelling (BIM) technology that is widely adopted in many advanced countries and regions to support learning and teaching of BIM courses. A new BIM Innovation Hub will also be established in our THEi campus in Tsing Yi early next year. With the advanced facilities and together with the provision of different authentic and relevant scenarios, we aim to foster each one of our students to develop the passion, technical aptitude and professionalism required to help them succeed in their future careers.

Skills and Talents are Key

In the next 15 and 20 years, certain occupations will no doubt disappear. But the changing world of work will lead to new opportunities and new jobs will appear. A number of reports have indicated that by 2020 one-third of the desired skill set of most jobs will comprise of skills not yet considered crucial today; and many jobs that we see today do not exist 5 years ago, like app developer, drone operator, cloud computing specialist, big data analyst, cyber security specialist.

The collaboration between education providers, Government and industry in building a truly permeable education system to achieve skills for success is the real way forward. Through the concerted efforts of all VPET players and the support of the Government and industries, I am sure VPET sector will grow steadily and continuously and nurture even more competent professionals for the sustainability and the betterment of our society and beyond.

Finally, I would like to thank the City of Winterthur for giving VTC the opportunity to co-organise this meaningful seminar. I wish you all a most rewarding exchange and networking experience in this Seminar.

Thank you.