

Focus Group Interviews for Identification of Workplace Skills for Post-secondary Education

Presentation of
Key Observations

24th November 2014



Agenda

- Research Background & Methodology
- Major Findings
 - Students' considerations for articulation pathways
 - Essential skills in workplace
 - Areas of improvement for raising graduates' employability
- Conclusion and Recommendations



RESEARCH BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY



Research Background & Objectives

- Given the strategic importance for the future development of the post-secondary education and the training of our workforce, the Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education (CSPE) organised the “*Seminar on Closer Alignment between Post-secondary Education Institutions and Industries*” in October 2013 aiming to kick-start the dialogue between various industries and the post-secondary sector to facilitate their further collaboration
- This qualitative study was conducted to **gather views from graduates of the self-financing post-secondary education sector** on the following aspects, which could serve as a reference for the post-secondary programme designs:
 - **How best their post-secondary education has equipped them** for their current jobs
 - **Essential skills required in the workplace that could be incorporated** in the curriculum design of post-secondary programmes



Research Methodology

- **Seven** focus groups/ mini groups & **five** in-depth interviews, each lasted around 1.5 hour, were conducted with graduates from six major economic sectors **between 26 August and 24 September 2014**

Economic Sector	No. of Respondents	Profile of Respondents						
		Education Level		Year of Graduation		Size of company (in terms of no. of full-time staff)		
		Sub-degree	Degree	07/08 - 09/10	10/11 - 12/13	1-49	50-99	100+
Total	39	30	9	16	23	14	3	22
Manufacturing sector	6	4	2	3	3	2	1	3
Construction sector	7	5	2	3	4	2	0	5
Information and communications sector	6	5	1	3	3	4	0	2
Financial services sector	6	5	1	1	5	1	0	5
Professional & business services sector	6	5	1	2	4	5	1	0
Social & personal services sector	8	6	2	4	4	0	1	7



MAJOR FINDINGS



STUDENTS' CONSIDERATIONS FOR ARTICULATION PATHWAYS



Key Considerations for Enrolling in Post-secondary Programmes

- **One's personal interest** guided their choice of post-secondary programmes
- Whether **enhanced one's competitiveness in the job market** by attaining relevant **recognised** education qualifications upon graduation
 - Post-secondary qualification was perceived to be **the basic requirement** for getting into the industry and for one's career development



Key Considerations for Choice of Future Articulation Pathways

Further Studies

- Degree qualification is necessary
 - ✓ For employment
 - ✓ For higher entry points

“唔同學歷入職，會有唔同grading。如果你係degree holder一入嚟就會做四等職；如果你中五入去可能係一等職，如果想升上去，就會多一段路。”

(Group 14: Higher Diploma in Business Administration, Operations Officer, Male)

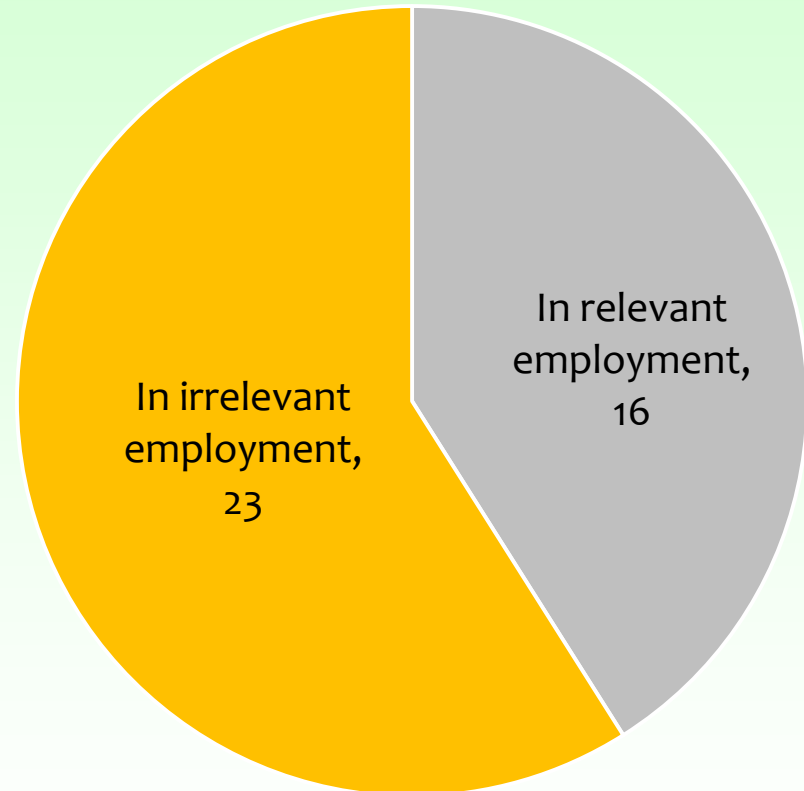
Employment

- To obtain work experience and exposure to real workplace environment to confirm their suitability in the particular industry before further studies
- To earn tuition fees to sustain their further studies



Key Considerations for Choice of Future Career

- Salary
- Articulation pathways of post-secondary programmes for further studies and/or future career



Base: All respondents (n = 39)



ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN WORKPLACE

- *From Graduates' Perspectives*

- ◆ Soft Skills
- ◆ Knowledge & Practical Skills
- ◆ Generic Skills



Soft skills were Perceived to be the Most Important in the Workplace

Soft Skills

- Reflected one's personal quality
- Had significant impact on **relationship with colleagues, supervisors & clients, & one's work performance**

Knowledge & Practical Skills

- Could be acquired through working experience

Generic Skills

- Could suffice if acquired basic generic skills

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Perception of Soft Skills

- ✓ Appreciated acquisition of soft skills through interesting & inspiring **personal development programmes &/ or activities**
- ✓ **With good emphasis on interpersonal skills**
 - Particularly important for *social & personal services sector & financial services sector* as their main job duties required **interaction with their service targets**
- ✗ Difficult to be **acquired** in the post-secondary programmes, but **through exposure & experience**

“以前讀書都係上堂，冇教對人嘅技巧，唔好話真係去接觸客戶，可能好普通，基本嘅人際關係都少提及……到工作時自己都係跟**senior**學，**跟上司學**。”
(Group 14: Higher Diploma in Business Administration, Clerk in bank, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Suggested Improvements for the Acquisition of Soft Skills

- To increase the coverage of soft skills in post-secondary programmes, particularly:
 - ❑ **Skills to communicate** with different target audience (e.g. clients, colleagues & supervisors)
 - ❑ **Emotional management** (e.g. work pressure & customer servicing attitude)
 - ❑ **Work attitude** (e.g. commitment and responsibility)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Perception of Knowledge & Practical Skills

- ✓ **Diversified topics** provided students with **basic knowledge** on particular industries, e.g. basic & comprehensive **work ethics** particularly for social & personal services sector & professional & business services sector
- ✓ Had the opportunities to interact with industry practitioners through **career talks/ career expo/ sharing sessions**

“IVE不時會有招聘會，會搵啲大公司講你入咗公司之後嘅進升機會之類。
又會搵舊生返嚟分享，其實對剛畢業學生相當好，因為身同感受。”
(Group 12: H.D. in Business Administration, Technical Assistant, Male)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Perception of Knowledge & Practical Skills

- ✓ Gained exposure to actual working environment in the industry through **company visits** & work experience through **internships**
- ✓ Got industry updates and job referrals from the **careers guidance team** of the post-secondary institution
- ✗ Depending on the industry engaged and its relevance to the employment, knowledge acquired in the academic setting might **not be fully applicable / transferable** to workplace environment (**Knowledge Gap**)

“原來出到嚟搵工，就算你咩都唔識都可以入去(TVB)做，唔需要你識任何嘢...
佢有自己一套做法，你只要跟佢嘅做法就得啦。”

(Group 16: Higher Diploma in Nutrition and Food Management,
Administrative Assistant, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Reasons for Having a Knowledge Gap

- Different corporations adopted different systems/workflow

“有超過一半(學咗嘅嘢)都未必有用，出面個社會個行業唔係好需要...好多都係fundamental嘅knowledge嚟嘅，你係有少少認識，但去到間公司根本係第二樣嘢，都係要重新學過。”
(IDI 4: Higher Diploma in Engineering, Draftman, Male)

- Course coverage was **too broad** and did not encompass details of a specific area of an industry
- Worked in positions with various daily routine & general duties in which **exposure & working experience mattered more**

“坦白講我覺得PR係**靠經驗**，喺入面只要你肯講，你肯打電話去搵sponsor，用腦去諗吓concept，諗下個event點搞就得。我覺得課程冇俾到好多...”
(Group 15: Higher Diploma in Public Relations and Media Business, Secretary, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Suggested Improvements for the Acquisition of Industry-specific Knowledge & Practical Skills

- To **update course content** according to industrial & regulation changes on a regular basis to better equip students with up-to-date industry knowledge and practical skills

“IVE成日同業內人仕review個course，有啲咩行業將來需要嘅會放落個course嘅，有啲佢覺得冇用就會cut，係與時並進。”

(Group 15: Bachelor Degree in BA Human Resources, HR Officer, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills



Perception of Language Proficiency

- ✓ **Adequate** training in business writing (e.g. email writing, report writing, formal business documents drafting) & verbal communication which were **relevant to workplace**
- ✗ Level of difficulty was **rather easy** for students who had already attained higher language proficiency

“簡單到中學、小學已經學過.....如果較高分啲...入，果堂就可以剔attendance然後唔洗聽書。唔係咁多同工作有關。”

(Group 15: H.D. in Public Relations & Media Business, Legal Secretary, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills - Language Proficiency



Generally Positive Impact of Language Proficiency on Employment

Professional & business services sector

- Essential to their work as their job duties involved **business writing and presentations**

Social & personal services sector

- **Communication and presentation skills** were important as their job duties involved communicating with clients

Financial services sector

Information & communications sector

- Less important to their job duties

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills - Language Proficiency



Suggested Improvements for the Acquisition of Language

- To introduce **Putonghua speaking courses**

“宜家好多工都要返內地，但係個課程都只係圍繞住香港同國際。到你出嚟做嘢先知原來普通話係重要。”

(IDI 2: H.D. in Accountancy, Technical assistant of air-conditioner, Male)

- To allow a **continuation of language courses** throughout the post-secondary education to reinforce & sustain development of language skills

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills - Language Proficiency



Relatively Neutral Impact of Numerical Competency on Employment

- **Particularly relevant in IT, accountancy, engineering and architecture industries**, however, the competency requirement was not that stringent nowadays given the advancement in technology – computer software was available for
 - Processing all sophisticated calculations
 - Checking and interpreting results
- **Complicated mathematics are not required for other industries**

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills - Numerical Proficiency



Information Technology Literacy Generally Perceived as Useful & Important

- ✓ Adequate training of **MS Word processing & updated software** specific to the industry
- ✗ Essential to be **self-driven** & self-learn in order to keep up with the fast-changing technology development

“而家工作趨勢係digital，咁幾年前讀果陣未有呢個trend，完全係未學過，我都係返工時自學。”

(Group 11: H.D. in Sales & Marketing, Marketing Assistant in Garment, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills – IT Literacy



Diverse Perceptions of Analytical & Problem-solving Ability

- ✓ Enhanced through participation in **group projects**
- ✓ **Applicable** to their employment
- ✗ **Lack of independency** in the learning environment of the post-secondary education retarded its development and application in the workplace

“我覺得解難能力比較難train，因為讀書始終唔同做嘢，做嘢好多時你係individual，你遇到問題係好講求你自己點樣去解決，但係你讀書時候有問題有朋輩一齊解決，變相個獨立能力唔夠高，……”

(Group 11: Higher Diploma in International Business, Advertising and Promotion Assistant, Female)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Generic Skills - Analytical & Problem-solving



Other Generic Skills Acquired

- Learnt to **communicate, get along and collaborate effectively** with others through:
 - Curriculum-based group projects
 - Extra-curricular activities, e.g. orientation camps, exchange programmes, etc.
- Inspired to **think from different perspectives**

“我覺得呢個係我讀咗大專俾到我最多嘅嘢...
老師嘅**價值觀**，令我地**Open-minded**咗，
而唔係好死咁去諗嘢.....”

(Group 15: Higher Diploma in Visual Communication, Designer, Male)

Soft Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

Other Generic Skills



ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN WORKPLACE

- *From Employers' Perspectives*



Important Skills Considered During Recruitment

Language Proficiency

Learning Ability

Work Attitude

Interpersonal Skills

Problem-solving Ability

Work Ethics

Industry Knowledge

Sense of Responsibility

Work Commitment

“我覺得當然你要識呢一行嘅嘢啦，但係有啲嘢你工作真係用到時，佢會再灌輸一啲你書本上面學唔到嘅知識俾你，呢啲係可以後加上。...但如果你都唔鍾意去學，你求其打份工就算，可能佢會覺得請咗你之後都無一個上進心，或者教唔到你乜嘢...同埋你個人如果係好懶散掛住玩，要你做嘢時你掛住做其他嘢，如果作為一個老闆我唔會想請呢啲員工，所以我覺得**工作態度好重要**。”
(Group 11: Bachelor of Business Administration, Sales Executive, Male)

“個人素質，解難能力。而家好多公司會擔心90後做嘢唔認真，**佢地比較想要獨立同有能力自己解決問題**。”
(Group 12: Higher Diploma in Accountancy, Accounting Officer, Female)



Key:



Soft Skills

Generic Skills

Knowledge & Practical Skills

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Important Skills Considered For Career Advancement



<p>Social & personal services sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic qualifications, communication skills & management skills were important as one got promoted and took up more managerial roles
<p>Financial services sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem-solving ability & leadership skills were even more crucial as one moved up the career ladder which would have more involvement in solving business problems & leading teams
<p>Information & communications sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of language proficiency increased as one involved more in senior positions which involved more communication with clients in both written & oral communications
<p>Construction sector</p>	



AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR RAISING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY



Hands-on Practice as Most Commonly Cited Learning Method among Respondents

- Preferred having **50-60%** of the curriculum as **practical applications** while **40-50%** as **theoretical learning**
- 1. Internships & workplace attachments**
 - ✓ To **apply** knowledge & skills acquired in real-life situations & to **recognise the gaps**
 - ✓ To get exposure into actual workplace & **identify career aspirations**
- 2. Case studies**
 - ✓ To **apply** knowledge acquired
- 3. Group projects, role play & presentations**
 - ✓ To **apply & demonstrate** knowledge acquired
 - ✓ To learn to **collaborate with others** & value the importance of **teamwork & communication skills**

“做project係最**practical**，最能夠學到嘢，你愈做得多，你愈被ban得多，就學得多。會知道行業或客戶要求係點。”
(Group 15: Higher Diploma in Visual Communication, Designer, Male)



Other Preferred Learning Methods

- Sharing from practitioners & activities providing exposure to workplace
 - To obtain information on **latest industry development**
 - To have **direct communications** with industry practitioners
- Leadership training, community services/ competitions
 - To developing **soft skills**
 - To enhancing **personal development**

“領袖訓練不用行業情況去train，因為領袖著重決斷力，分析力，人際技巧或個人風采等，係任何行業都係咁應用。”
(IDI 2: H.D. in Accountancy, Technical Assistant, Male)



More Collaboration between Institutions & the Industry

- To offer **more** quality internships or workplace attachment (particularly for AD programmes) which are **relevant to students' studies** and of **appropriate duration**
 - To provide exposure & equip students for future career
 - To facilitate cross-learning between the academic and workplace settings
 - To allow sufficient time for graduates to experience the working culture in the industry
- To provide more career information/ guidance to students via career talks/ career expos/ industry or corporate competitions/ interview preparation sessions



Enhancing Recognition of Post-secondary Programmes

- Need of more recognition for sub-degree qualification among employers
- Need of more **job vacancies** for sub-degree holders
 - Students would be tempted to choose any of the Bachelor degree programmes over AD/HD programmes with sincere interest



Facilitating Students' Attainment of Professional Qualifications/ Certificate

- To provide more **information on the professional examinations**
- To provide **exemptions to certain examinations**, particularly for industries such as accountancy & engineering, in which a number of examinations have to be taken in order to get chartered



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Conclusion & Recommendations (I)

1. In views of students' concerns of the **transferability** of knowledge into practical skills in the workplace & inadequate training in **soft skills**, the following measures might be considered:
 - Have more **collaboration & communication** with the industry in **programme design & career guidance**
 - More up-to-date industrial information incorporated in the course design to help students better understand the industry & its development
 - To ensure good match of employment from the perspectives of employers & students
 - **Educate students** on the knowledge gap & the importance of transferring knowledge into practical skills through personal ability
 - Provide more practice opportunities, e.g. **relevant quality internship opportunities**
 - Organise more **programmes/ activities** for **personal development**, e.g. leadership training/ community services/ soft skills enhancement or inspiring programmes



Conclusion & Recommendations (II)

2. With respect to students' concerns of inadequate training in **language skills**, the following measures might be considered:
 - **Enrich the language courses** for enhancing the confidence of using the languages learnt
 - To deliver **language courses of different levels** to students with different levels of language proficiency so that all students would be benefited from the courses
 - To provide more training in **workplace Putonghua speaking**
 - To enhance the **continuity of language courses** so that students would be immersed in improving language proficiency continuously during their post-secondary studies



Conclusion & Recommendations (III)

3. For students' concerns of the **programme recognition**, the following measures might be considered:
- Facilitating students' attainment of **professional qualification/ certificate** by:
 - Providing **more information** on the types of professional qualifications/ certificate that are relevant for applying specific job positions & long-term career development in the industry
 - Enhancing the programme design for **possible exemption** of the elementary examination papers for attaining professional qualifications/ certificate
 - Assisting students with the **registration & preparation** for the examinations of the professional qualifications



End of Presentation

24th November 2014

