

## Develop our Workforce for the Information Economy

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Hong Kong should adopt a multi-dimensional approach with short and longer term measures, focusing on both supply and quality, to address its IT manpower issues. The Government today (August 21) published the Report of the Task Force on IT Manpower on measures to enhance the supply of quality IT manpower in Hong Kong.

These include immediate measures to meet the current shortfall, to nurture local young talents and enhance their IT capability; and longer term measures to explore with tertiary institutions and other concerned bodies sustainable solutions to develop a skilled IT workforce for the future.

These are the findings of the Task Force on IT Manpower which was set up in November last year to advise the Government on measures to strengthen IT manpower supply in Hong Kong.

The Task Force, chaired by Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting, Mrs Carrie Yau, comprises representatives of the IT industry, employers, professional bodies, industry associations, education and training institutions, as well as relevant Government departments.

The report noted that IT workers were required not only in the IT industry but in almost every other sector of the economy as well in the new Information Age.

This has led to a shortfall that has become a global phenomenon- with an estimated global deficit of 500,000 IT-related jobs that is forecast to grow to one million by 2002 and demand may outstrip supply by as much as 20 per cent within five years, it said.

In Hong Kong, a survey by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) estimated that, as at March 2000, over 61,000 persons were engaged in IT-related work in Hong Kong. The survey forecast that the number of IT personnel would increase to 106,000 in 2004, of whom around 55 per cent should be at degree level or above.

Also, in the Report on Manpower Projection to 2005 commissioned by the Government, it was revealed that the overall demand for IT personnel in Hong Kong would grow at an average annual growth rate of 11.8%.

These figures, representing an average additional demand of between 8,000 and 11,000 IT personnel annually, illustrate that there is a clear need to adopt immediate and longer term measures to address the shortage of IT manpower in Hong Kong, the Report noted.

Recognizing the importance of developing IT human resources, the Government has been investing substantially at all levels of education and training. The five-year strategy "Information technology for Learning in a New Era" was launched in primary and secondary schools in 1998 to drive the development of IT in education. The strategy involves a capital investment of \$3.2 billion and annual recurrent expenditure of over \$550 million. In the tertiary sector, institutions have introduced various IT curricula at degree level or above as well as strengthening the IT infrastructure in campus. Local vocational, retraining and industry support bodies also provide a wide range of IT training at sub-degree level to sustain the development of Hong Kong's economy. There is also a wide range of continuing and professional education on IT for life-long learning.

The Report noted that some local universities require all their students to have basic IT knowledge. The successful completion of an IT proficiency test is a requirement for graduation. Similar arrangement applies to English which is, de facto, the international language for IT and the Internet. Most institutions have made it compulsory for their students to take courses in English, and to pass the corresponding tests in their studies.

The Task Force recommends in the Report a package of 13 measures to address the IT manpower needs:

(a) Immediate measures:

- \* Implement the scheme to admit Mainland IT professionals.
- \* Streamline the admission regime for overseas IT professionals.
- \* Expand post-secondary programme.
- \* Encourage world-renowned private IT training institutions to operate in Hong Kong.
- \* Implement an academic plan in the Cyberport to develop professional IT talent.

- \* Accredit IT skills below degree level.
- \* Encourage Hong Kong and Mainland talent overseas to work here.

(b) Nurture local young talents:

- \* Intensify exchange/internship programme with emphasis on IT and improve the standard of English through immersion.
- \* Collaborate with the industry to provide professional IT training for secondary students.

(c) Longer term measures to be explored:

- \* Enhance output of university graduates in IT and related disciplines and increase IT content in both IT and non-IT disciplines.
- \* Promote and accept credit transfer/exemption in universities for IT-related disciplines.
- \* Set up corporate schools in IT field in collaboration with the industry.
- \* Explore the feasibility of establishing a community IT college.

Some of these recommendations have already been put into action.

With the high-end estimate of an annual additional demand of 11 000 IT personnel (with 55% at degree level or above) and assumptions based on employment survey and take-up rate of IT work, the bulk of the annual increase of 6 000 at degree level or above should be able to be met by the estimated 5 000 students who would graduate from local universities in IT and related disciplines each year and enter into the workforce for IT-related work. For the remaining gap, it could be bridged by various means like admission of Mainland or overseas IT professionals, or local talent overseas returning to Hong Kong. However, the demand and supply situation in the market is very dynamic and we will closely monitor the position and review the effects of the implementation of the various measures recommended in the Report.

As for the annual increase of 5 000 below degree level, the bulk should be able to be met by the 3 000 students graduating from sub-degree courses in IT and related disciplines and entering into the workforce for IT-related work each year. For the remaining gap, it could be bridged through the expansion of the post-secondary programme, vocational training, employee retraining and continuing and professional education. The Report concluded that if Hong Kong is to maintain its role as a leading

digital city in the information economy, it must sustain its capability for future economic growth. In this regard, a pool of skilled and competent IT talent is crucial to enable Hong Kong to enhance its overall competitiveness in the international arena.

The Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau (ITBB) has briefed the Legislative Council Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel on the findings of the Report in July. The full copy of the Report is now available at ITBB's website at [www.info.gov.hk/itbb](http://www.info.gov.hk/itbb). The Report has also been distributed to various IT bodies, trade and industry organisations, chambers of commerce, local universities and consulates, etc. to keep them abreast of the IT manpower situation in Hong Kong. It can also be obtained at various District Offices. The Report will also be distributed overseas through various economic and trade offices to parties which may have an interest about the IT manpower situation in Hong Kong.

Following is the membership list of the Task Force on IT Manpower:

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END/Tuesday, August 21, 2001  
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