

YOUTH COLLEGE

Executive Summary

1. The Youth College (YC) is one of the Vocational Training Council (VTC)'s 13 member institutions. YC provides vocational and professional education and training to Secondary 3 to 6 school leavers to equip them with knowledge and skills for further studies and employment. Training programmes offered by YC are full-time Diploma of Vocational Education (DVE) programmes, full-time Diploma of Vocational Baccalaureate (DVB) programmes, part-time Diploma/Certificate programmes, the Teen's Programme and the Project for Tradesman Trainees. In academic year 2020/21 (other than calendar years and unless otherwise specified, all years (e.g. 2020/21) mentioned in this Audit Report refer to academic years), there were 5,770, 252, and 3,469 students studying in the full-time DVE programmes, full-time DVB programmes and part-time Diploma/Certificate programmes respectively and 1,305 trainees participating in other training programmes. As at 31 March 2021, YC had an establishment of 727.5 staff, comprising 5 principals, 399.5 teaching staff and 323 non-teaching staff. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of YC.

Management of training programmes

2. *Some programmes are under/over-enrolled by more than 10%.* In 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21, of the 33, 35 and 36 full-time DVE programmes, regarding Year 1 students, 5 (15%), 18 (51%) and 16 (44%) programmes respectively were under-enrolled by more than 10%, and 14 (42%), 10 (29%) and 15 (42%) programmes respectively were over-enrolled by more than 10%. Of the 33 full-time DVE programmes offered by YC every year in the period, 9 (27%) had under/over-enrolment of Year 1 students of more than 10% in each and every year (paras. 2.3 and 2.4).

3. *Enrolment of some programmes decreased significantly.* Of the 33 full-time DVE programmes offered by YC every year in the period from 2018/19 to 2020/21, the Year 1 student enrolment of 3 (9%) programmes in 2020/21 decreased by more than 50% comparing to that in 2018/19 (para. 2.7).

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4. *Need to improve the performance of some training programmes.* YC reports the performance of its training programmes under six performance indicators. Performance targets were set for three indicators. Audit noted that in the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20: (a) against the target rate of 100%, the average enrolment rates of the 45 programmes ranged from 92% to 112%. There were 26 (58%) programmes with under-enrolment or over-enrolment by more than 10% for 3 years or more; (b) every year, there were programmes not meeting the target retention rates (85%, 90% and 95% for different programmes). The retention rates of 5 (11%) of the 45 programmes were below targets for 3 years or more; (c) every year, there were full-time DVE programmes not meeting the target employment rate of 85%. The employment rates of graduates of 8 (32%) of the 25 full-time DVE programmes were below target for 3 years or more; (d) the average pass rates of the 45 programmes ranged from 91% to 94%. The pass rates of 11 (24%) programmes in 2019/20 decreased by 5 percentage points or more as compared to those in 2015/16; (e) the average level of student satisfaction of the 45 programmes ranged from 7.45 to 7.58 (out of a 10-point scale). The scores for student satisfaction of 7 (16%) programmes in 2018/19 decreased by 0.5 point or more as compared to those in 2015/16; and (f) the average level of employer satisfaction decreased from 7.33 to 6.94 (out of a 10-point scale). The scores for employer satisfaction of 12 (40%) of the 30 programmes covered at least twice in the Survey of Employers' Views decreased by 0.5 point or more (paras. 2.11, 2.13 and 2.14).

5. *Need to collect employers' views on more graduates.* Employers are invited to participate in the Survey of Employers' Views if the graduates they employed have been employed in jobs relevant to their training programmes for at least three months and the graduates agree that their employers are surveyed. Audit noted that: (a) not more than 60% of such graduates of 2016 to 2018 agreed that their employers were surveyed. Although the response rates were 66% to 71%, the Survey only collected employers' views on about 30% to 39% of such graduates; and (b) the employers' views on graduates from 14 (33%) of 43 programmes in 2016, 9 (19%) of 47 programmes in 2017 and 18 (37%) of 49 programmes in 2018 were not collected by the Survey (paras. 2.15 and 2.16).

6. *Need to encourage more employers to join Workplace Learning and Assessment (WLA).* In 2014/15, YC launched the Earn and Learn Scheme (E&L Scheme) in three full-time DVE programmes for Secondary 3 to 5 (S3-S5) school leavers to provide on-the-job training for the students while they continue their study. Since 2019/20, YC has incorporated WLA into the eight DVE full-time programmes offering E&L Scheme. Through WLA, VTC aims to facilitate

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integration of school-based learning and workplace learning by including learning and assessment at workplace as part of the curriculum requirement. Only the employers participating in E&L Scheme are eligible to join WLA. Of the 112 employers in 2019/20 and the 116 employers in 2020/21 participating in E&L Scheme, only 52 (46%) and 59 (51%) respectively joined WLA (paras. 2.20 to 2.22).

7. *Need to explore the feasibility of extending E&L Scheme and WLA to more DVE programmes.* Since 2019/20, YC has incorporated WLA into the eight DVE full-time programmes offering E&L Scheme. Both E&L Scheme and WLA add value to the training programmes and are complementary to each other in enhancing the employability of the students. In 2020/21, YC offered 19 full-time DVE programmes for S3-S5 school leavers. YC has not extended E&L Scheme or WLA from the 8 programmes to the remaining 11 programmes (paras. 2.24 and 2.25).

Campus management

8. *Need to improve utilisation of some teaching and learning facilities.* Audit found that there was room for improving the utilisation of some teaching and learning facilities. In 2018/19, the utilisation rates of the 211 teaching and learning facilities averaged 48% and the utilisation rates of 105 (50%) facilities were below 50%. Among the 211 facilities, there were 89 classrooms, 36 computer laboratories and 20 language laboratories. The utilisation rates of these three major categories of facilities ranged from 1% to 98% (averaging 57%), 25% to 79% (averaging 53%) and 15% to 77% (averaging 41%) respectively (paras. 3.4 and 3.5).

9. *Guidelines on hire of facilities not complied with.* In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, there were 91 hires of facilities to organisations outside VTC. VTC's guidelines on hire of facilities were not complied with: (a) in 24 (26%) hires, hire charges were calculated on a half-hourly basis instead of an hourly basis; (b) in 2 (2%) hires, the revised charge rates were not used; (c) in 27 (30%) hires, the hire charges were not collected in advance; and (d) of the 6 cases of waiver of hire charges, in 2 cases, applications for waiver of hire charges were not made in writing and in 4 cases, there was no documentary evidence showing that the hirers had applied for the waiver (paras. 3.7 and 3.8).

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10. ***Room for rationalising requirements in Campus Safety Management Manuals.*** In the Safety Management Framework, VTC promulgated its safety and health policies, guidelines and procedures. In accordance with the Framework, each YC campus promulgated a Campus Safety Management Manual. Audit found that there were variations in the requirements between the 8 Manuals, and some requirements in the Manuals were not compatible with the Framework and/or legal requirements. For instance: (a) for accidents which resulted in incapacity of an employee exceeding 3 days, 6 Manuals stipulated submission of the required notice to VTC headquarters in less than 4 days and 2 stipulated less than 3 days (versus less than 3 calendar days stipulated in the Framework); and (b) only 5 Manuals stipulated the requirements for reporting to the Commissioner for Labour within 24 hours accidents resulting in the death of an employee and accidents involving dangerous occurrences defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509). None of the Manuals stipulated the other pertinent reporting requirements under the Ordinance (paras. 3.15 and 3.16).

11. ***Requirements in Safety Management Framework and Campus Safety Management Manuals not complied with.*** In the period from 2016/17 to 2019/20, the 8 YC campuses reported 53 accidents. Audit found that: (a) for the 4 campuses which required accidents to be reported within 2 days, 10 (36%) of the 28 accidents were reported 1 to 62 days later than the Manuals' stipulated deadlines; (b) there were 10 accidents involving work injuries, 4 (40%) of which were reported to VTC headquarters 2 to 13 days later than the Framework's stipulated deadlines. Subsequently, the notices for these 4 accidents were submitted to the Commissioner for Labour 1 to 10 days later than the legal requirements; and (c) for 2 accident investigation reports which were required to be submitted within 7 days, 1 (50%) was submitted 37 days late (para. 3.18).

12. ***Campus environmental targets not always met.*** YC campuses are required to meet environmental targets to reduce waste and consumption of resources. In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, every year there were campuses not meeting the environmental targets (paras. 3.23 and 3.24).

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Other Administrative issues

13. ***Need to encourage staff to attain more Continuous Professional Development (CPD) hours.*** Staff covered by CPD Scheme are encouraged to attain not less than 40 CPD hours within a CPD cycle of 24 months. Audit found that: (a) for the CPD cycle from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2017, 54 (12%) of the 444 staff attained less than 40 CPD hours; and (b) for the CPD cycle from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2019, 62 (15%) of the 426 staff attained less than 40 CPD hours (paras. 4.2 and 4.3).

14. ***Guidelines on further employment of staff not complied with.*** In the period from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2021, there were 17 approved applications for further employment beyond the age of 60. Audit found that: (a) in 8 (47%) cases, the principals supported the applications but had not provided the action plans/succession plans as required; (b) in 2 (12%) cases, there was no documentary evidence showing that consideration had been given to whether the applicants' extension of service would cause promotion blockage; (c) in 13 (76%) cases, there was no documentary evidence showing that the physical fitness of the applicants had been considered; and (d) in 10 (59%) cases, the dates of informing the applicants of the results of applications were later than required (paras. 4.5 and 4.6).

15. ***Need to avoid prolonged acting appointments.*** In the period from financial years 2016-17 to 2020-21, 146 staff undertook acting appointments (including acting-up, doubling-up and doubling-sideways) in 214 acting periods. The total acting allowance paid was \$12.3 million. The durations of the 214 acting periods ranged from 1 month to 3.4 years. No guidelines were promulgated on the length of prolonged acting appointments that would be considered as undesirable and unsustainable (paras. 4.9 and 4.10).

16. ***Results of sexual conviction record checks not documented.*** According to VTC guidelines, sexual conviction record check is required for all new recruits of teaching positions in YC. The result is required to be recorded in writing and filed as a formal appointment record. In the period from financial years 2018-19 to 2020-21, for 3 of the 20 appointment records examined by Audit, the sexual conviction record check results had not been documented as required (paras. 4.11 and 4.12).

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17. ***Need to conduct annual stocktaking exercise and submit stocktaking reports in a timely manner.*** As of 31 July 2021, YC had an inventory of 12,248 items with total purchase costs of \$80.5 million. The inventory was mainly comprised of computer equipment, audio-visual equipment, and workshop and laboratory equipment. In the six financial years from 2015-16 to 2020-21, 32 stocktaking reports were submitted to VTC headquarters by the 8 YC campuses for 4 annual stocktaking exercises. Audit found that: (a) 16 (50%) stocktaking reports were submitted 6 days to 5.1 months later than the submission deadlines; and (b) in 13 (81%) of the 16 cases of late submissions, the stocktaking exercises were completed even after the report submission deadlines (paras. 4.17 and 4.18).

18. ***Need to enhance guidelines on valuable and attractive stores.*** With effect from financial year 2017-18, YC is required to complete a full stocktaking on all valuable and attractive stores every two years and submit a list of valuable and attractive items checked to VTC headquarters. Audit noted that: (a) 4 campuses did not classify any of their inventory items as valuable and attractive stores and hence no stocktaking on valuable and attractive stores had been conducted; (b) of the 4 remaining campuses, 2 (50%) did not conduct the full stocktaking exercise on all valuable and attractive stores in the cycle of 2019-20 to 2020-21; and (c) there were inconsistencies among the 8 YC campuses in their criteria for classifying valuable and attractive stores (paras. 4.20 to 4.22).

19. ***Need to ensure that surprise stock and security checks are conducted.*** According to VTC guidelines, surprise stock and security checks should be carried out at least once every year and the findings recorded in the surprise inspection books. Audit found that, in each financial year from 2015-16 to 2020-21, 6 (75%) of the 8 campuses did not conduct surprise stock and security checks and 5 (83%) of the 6 campuses did not have a surprise inspection book (paras. 4.24 and 4.25).

20. ***Need to ensure that lost stores are written-off in a timely manner.*** According to VTC Stores Manual, where losses or deficiencies of stores are identified, an application for write-off of stores should be submitted for approval as soon as possible. Audit found that: (a) application for write-off of 12 books that had been lost since 2010 was not submitted and approved until July 2021 after Audit's enquiry; and (b) 3 books were found lost in the annual stocktaking exercise in financial year 2018-19, but the application for write-off of stores was not submitted until April 2021 (paras 4.27 and 4.28).

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21. *Need to make improvements in organising student activities.* The 8 Student Development Offices of YC organise various student activities for students. In 2020/21, there were 360 activities organised. Audit found that: (a) the number of activity-hours varied among campuses, ranging from 27 to 169.5; (b) of the 360 activities organised, target numbers of participants were not set for 40 (11%) activities; (c) of the 320 activities with target numbers of participants set, the targets were not met in 225 (70%) activities. In particular, the participation rates of 40 (13%) activities were less than 50%; and (d) evaluations were not conducted for 86 (24%) of the 360 activities (paras. 4.32 to 4.34).

Audit recommendations

22. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has *recommended* that the Executive Director, VTC should:**

Management of training programmes

- (a) **avoid significant under/over-enrolments of training programmes and plan the number of places as accurately as possible (para. 2.9 (a) and (b));**
- (b) **for training programmes with significant decreases in student enrolments, identify the reasons for the decrease and take appropriate measures to address the issue (para. 2.9(c));**
- (c) **step up efforts to enhance performance of training programmes (para. 2.18(a));**
- (d) **collect employers' views on more graduates in the Survey of Employers' Views (para. 2.18(b));**
- (e) **encourage more employers to join WLA and explore the merits and feasibility of extending E&L Scheme and WLA to more full-time DVE programmes for S3-S5 school leavers (para. 2.29 (a) and (b));**

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Campus management

- (f) **improve the utilisation of teaching and learning facilities (para. 3.13(a));**
- (g) **ensure that guidelines on hire of facilities are complied with (para. 3.13(b));**
- (h) **rationalise the variations in the requirements stipulated in the Campus Safety Management Manuals of different campuses (para. 3.21(a));**
- (i) **ensure that requirements stipulated in the Campus Safety Management Manuals are compatible with the Safety Management Framework and legal requirements (para. 3.21(b));**
- (j) **ensure that requirements stipulated in the Safety Management Framework and the Campus Safety Management Manuals are complied with (para. 3.21(c));**
- (k) **step up efforts in facilitating the achievement of environmental targets (para. 3.26);**

Other administrative issues

- (l) **encourage staff to actively participate in CPD training and activities and attain not less than 40 CPD hours in each CPD cycle (para. 4.14(a));**
- (m) **ensure that the requirements stipulated in VTC guidelines for further employment of staff beyond the age of 60 are complied with (para. 4.14(b));**
- (n) **enhance the guidelines on prolonged acting appointments and ensure that prolonged acting appointments are avoided as far as practicable (para. 4.14(c));**
- (o) **ensure that results of sexual conviction record checks for new recruits in teaching positions are documented (para. 4.14(d));**

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- (p) ensure that annual stocktaking exercises are conducted in a timely manner and stocktaking reports are submitted before the deadlines (para. 4.30(a));
- (q) issue guidelines on the criteria for classifying store items as valuable and attractive stores and ensure that the requirement for conducting full stocktaking exercise on all valuable and attractive stores is complied with (para. 4.30(b));
- (r) ensure that surprise stock and security checks are conducted and the results are properly recorded (para. 4.30(c));
- (s) ensure that applications for write-off of lost stores are submitted in a timely manner (para. 4.30(d)); and
- (t) make improvements in organising student activities (para. 4.36).

Response from the Vocational Training Council

23. The Executive Director, VTC agrees with the audit recommendations.