

New Youth Development Commission

The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address stated that a new high-level Youth Development Commission would be set up and would subsume, within its remit, the responsibilities of the current Commission on Youth.



The policy of the current Commission on Youth is oriented very much towards developing a meritocratic society through encouraging individual young people to become leaders of society 'with horizons, creativity, leadership and commitment ...'. Not everybody can ultimately become a leader; not everybody wants to be a leader. In reality, there has to be a majority who have to be happy.

Moreover, 'horizons, creativity, leadership and commitment' focus on specific mental traits to be encouraged in individual young people, not their mental health and physical well being, and especially that of being a happy and valued member of an inclusive, more egalitarian society. This seems necessary to protect the long-term stability of an increasingly complex Hong Kong society.

The medical profession today recognizes the basic truth of the long-held saying "healthy body, healthy mind". For example, regular physical exercise has been shown to:

- Reduce the risk of and alleviate mental depression
- Relieve stress and improve sleep
- Increase and protect brain function and memory
- Protect and improve joint flexibility and bone density
- Improve self-confidence, self-discipline and physical posture
- Improve social interaction and reduce antisocial behaviour, especially through participation in team-based activities

- Help in the fight against obesity in young people and thereby reduce the risk of them developing serious life-threatening health problems in later life at significant long-term cost to everyone

Although the Hong Kong Water Sports Council cannot claim any depth of medical expertise, its members collectively have many decades of hands-on experience in working with young people from all levels of society.

The council's members can all quote examples where participation in their respective sport has wrought change for the good in young people who might otherwise have fallen by the wayside, or failed to achieve their full potential.

An example is that of the Hong Kong, China Rowing Association which, in its early days, established a school visit programme to invite students to take up rowing. The association immediately noted that the highest uptake came from students in lower-band schools.

The enthusiastic response from these students was also strongly backed by parents and teachers because of the marked improvement seen in the attitude of those participating in the programme.

Higher levels of attention in class and improvements in grades were noted, as were changes in their personal behavior and happiness outside the classroom. Participation in an outdoor physical sport, in a competitive team environment under qualified coaching, was seen to have provided a beneficial focus and outlet for the restless energy that often proves troubling for young people. Indeed, support for the programme led to the HKCRA being the first sports association to receive funding from the Quality Education Fund.

The HKWSC is of the view, therefore, that the commission's current policy should be broadened to actively and widely encourage young people to participate in sports, particularly team sports. The purpose of this is to develop

healthy, well-rounded and balanced team players who will willingly participate in, and contribute to, their community. From these team players, the best would then naturally emerge and receive general community support as our potential future leaders.

While there are many sports that young people could be encouraged to take up, watersports are widely recognized as one of the best forms of physical exercise. They offer a wide range of safe, non-contact, outdoor and indoor,



individual and team, activities suitable for people of all ages and physical abilities,

including those with physical and intellectual impairments.

Moreover, the total area of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is 2,754 square kilometres. At least 1,650 square kilometres (or 60%) is water area, four times more in area than the 443 square kilometres of country parks. There is, thus, considerable scope to expand the current level of local water sports activities at relatively little cost and minimal use of scarce land resources.



In making the case for young people's participation in sport to fall within the policy remit of the future Youth Development Commission, we recognize that the Sports Commission was established in 2001 to separately advise the government on the policies, funding and implementation of sports development. The HKWSC is not suggesting that the Sports Commission's remit be changed, more that the two commissions should be tasked to actively collaborate to establish a holistic policy and implementation framework to encourage participation in sports as part of an overall youth development policy.

As part of this, consideration might also be given to include within the members of the new Youth Development Commission some young people having a sports background.

