

THE HONG KONG HOUSING AUTHORITY

Memorandum for the Human Resources Committee

Vocational Training Strategy for Housing Manager Grade

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to outline a vocational training strategy for the Housing Manager (HM) grade to meet both job-specific and staff development needs for improving service delivery. The proposed training strategy will form part of the Housing Authority's overall training and development strategy under the Human Resources Management Plan of the Management Enhancement Programme.

BACKGROUND

2. The Housing Authority (HA) recognizes that training and development is an investment in staff and an important driver programme for improving organizational effectiveness. It plays an important role in helping staff to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively. As part of HA's HRM initiatives, we are planning to provide stepped up training for staff with a view to enhancing service delivery and development.

3. The work of the Department has become more complex with new programmes and initiatives introduced in recent years to cope with the changing external environment. The Housing Manager grade^{Note 1}, made up of some 3500 officers, is the largest staff group in the department and forms the backbone for delivering quality housing services directly to HA clients. They are the fore-front staff with an important service delivery role. Housing Officers are recruited as generalists and most are new to housing management work when they first enter the grade. It is therefore important to offer them job-specific training at appropriate stages of their career to enable them to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively according to the job competencies

^{Note 1} : The HM grade serves mainly the Management Branch (67%), Commercial & Services Branch, Allocation & Marketing Branch. There are a number of secondees for the Corporate Services Branch to perform training & staff welfare functions and to Home Affairs Dept to work in the Building Management Coordinating Team.

defined for the grade. We also need to ensure a constant supply of professionally qualified HOs for promotion as AHM and beyond, to improve the quality of service delivery to our clients, and to provide a cadre of housing management professionals for the Department.

CURRENT TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

4. Vocational training covers a wide range of job-based in-service training specific to different job levels in the grade and external courses to enable staff to become professionals. It includes induction, foundation, professional training, and continuous development and update, covering aspects of functional, managerial/supervisory and general skills development. The distribution of training activities and average training days per staff per annum in 1995 and 1996 are illustrated in Figures I to IV of **Appendix I**.

5. Vocational training is provided in stages through offering in-service training courses as well as sponsoring staff to attend the HKU part-time day-release courses in housing management. The **in-service courses** can broadly be categorized into -

- (i) induction training for Housing Officers
- (ii) foundation training for Housing Officers
- (iii) estate management policies & practices
- (iv) enforcement and legislation
- (v) housing finance
- (vii) maintenance services

Most in-service courses are conducted by experienced AHMs and HMs on secondment to the T&D Centre, or line managers drawn from different housing functions for selected topics relevant to their experience and expertise.

6. **External courses** concentrate mainly on professional training through the Certificate in Housing Practice (CHP), Diploma in Housing Management (DHM) and the Master of Housing Management (MHM) programmes offered by the HKU. In 1996/97,

365 officers had been sponsored to attend these courses. The total training expenses amounted to \$6M per annum.

THE NEED TO IMPROVE AND ENHANCE VOCATIONAL TRAINING

7. Current provision of vocational training to staff is based on historical pattern. The following issues have been identified -

- (i) reliance on professional qualification as indicator and benchmark for job competence;
- (ii) large population makes it lengthy to cover target groups for training;
- (iii) ad hoc approach in organizing and nominating staff for training courses; and
- (iv) uneven distribution of training opportunities among different ranks of staff in the grade.

PROPOSED STRATEGY

8. It is proposed that the vocational training strategy of the HM grade should be developed in line with the following T & D principles -

- (i) provide clearly defined objectives for vocational training, having regard to market trends and new demands on housing services, to ensure good match of new training programmes with job and grade specific requirements;
- (ii) provide a systematic framework and roadmap to sharpen the focus of vocational training and provide a building block for different stages of career progression;
- (iii) ensure a more balanced distribution of training opportunities among all ranks of the grade;
- (iv) develop partnership approach in the provision of training, by using resources of the T & D Centre, experience and expertise of line managers, and training capacity of external training institutions and professional

bodies, to provide a balance of central programmes, on-the-job training and external programmes;

- (v) develop the role of supervisors to work with staff to provide coaching and guidance for work-based development. Regular work progress and competencies review to be held jointly between the supervisors and staff would be an excellent tool for such purpose;
- (vi) develop staff through career postings and more exposure to different job functions to enable them to gain wider scope of knowledge and skills through job experience; and
- (vii) encourage staff to make self appraisal of training needs and take an interest in job-based self improvement, whilst developing professional expertise.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

9. Based on the principles as set out in paragraph 8, an implementation plan has been drawn up, and some progress achieved to-date are highlighted below -

(I) Improving the management of training

- (a) A Branch Training Committee has been established to oversee the overall training for the grade. The T & D Centre is working closely with the Branch Training Committee and Grade Management to provide forward planning, continuous monitoring and review of vocational training programmes for the grade. With the recent re-organization of the departmental functions, we will review the structure of the Training Committee to align with core business operations and delegate more T&D responsibilities to Business Branches.
- (b) To be specific of job requirements and identify training needs for the grade.
 - (i) Core competency profiles for the grade have been developed and applied in recruitment of Housing Officers, whereas functional competency profiles and training roadmaps are being developed.

- (ii) The T & D Centre, in consultation with Branch Heads, is launching training needs analyses to formulate an annual training plan to address issues identified in this paper.

(II) A Systematic framework for vocational training

- (a) To introduce 3 stages of training for the grade -

Core : Induction, foundation and post-specific training to meet job requirements and to achieve specified level of competence prescribed for current job level;

Professional : Professional development in order to be qualified as a professional staff and to meet occupational standards;

Extended : Special job skills and regular updating for continuous development and meeting changes in housing services.

- (b) To introduce continuous improvement of the training curriculum -

Training for Housing Officers (HOs) -

- (i) Enhanced Induction Programme for HOs

The Induction Course for newly recruited HOs has been revised by increasing course duration from 5.5 days to 12.5 days. The new Induction Programme covers the general aspects of HOs' job, including housing management policies & practices, inter-personal relationship, team work, customer service and a computer training workshop, which are important components of their job. HOs will receive the training as soon as they report for duty.

- (ii) Revised Foundation Course for HOs

The Foundation Course is designed to help HOs understand housing policies and practical skills in housing management.

It is also a pre-requisite programme for entry to the Certificate Course in Housing Practices. The curriculum has been revised to include a new module on 'Service Culture and Management Studies'.

(III) Developing an integrated approach in training

- (a) Training programmes provided centrally by the T & D Centre are being strengthened in collaboration with line managers, and will complement on-the-job training and external programmes. Examples are -

- Courses on Housing Fixed Penalty Ticket System
- Hawker Control
- Asset & Income Assessment

In addition to seconding trainers to T&D Centre to provide central training, suitable line managers are being invited as occasional speakers to conduct the courses. A partnership approach is adopted.

- (b) We have been maintaining close liaison with local universities to reflect our training needs and to explore opportunities for out-sourcing some of our in-house programmes.

(IV) Professional Training

- (a) For In-service Staff

At present, HOs are being sponsored to attend the Certificate in Housing Practice (CHP) and Diploma in Housing Management (DHM) programmes offered by HKU. The courses help to qualify staff as professionals in the field. These qualifications are part of the criteria for promotion as AHM and above. In view of the significance of the programmes and the large number of HOs awaiting opportunities for training, we have arranged for HKU to increase the places on the courses starting in 1998. To ensure suitable and meritorious staff are selected for sponsorship of professional training, the selection criteria for attending the courses have been revised and implemented in the Selection Test conducted in May 1997.

(b) For Direct Entry to the Grade

As a long term measure to reduce the training commitment, we will be in close liaison with tertiary institutions to provide a full time degree programme in Housing Management for direct supply of candidates for entry to the grade. This will be a priority issue.

10. The proposed implementation plan for the vocational training strategy for the Housing Manager Grade is summarized at **Appendix II**.

MAJOR FOCUS AND NEXT STEP

I. Priority of vocational training

11. It is the department's prime objective to train and develop staff systematically in different stages of their career, to equip them with the required job knowledge and skills for better service delivery and prepare them for upward mobility in the career ladder. For this purpose, a training roadmap for the HM grade has been developed at **Appendix III** to illustrate the training pathways at different career stages.

12. As the nature of work for the HM grade has grown in complexity, and more delegation of responsibility down the line is expected, the strengthening of middle management capability is needed. The training of staff beyond attaining professional qualification should be stepped up.

(A) Training for AHMs

13. For the Assistant Housing Managers (AHMs), the training focus will be directed at job and managerial skills. Training programmes on contract administration, customer service, managing staff and performance, will be stepped up. Regular seminars and briefings will be arranged to provide update on job and departmental issues, and prepare them for the changing nature of work and new departmental initiatives.

(B) Training for HMs, SHMs & CHMs

14. To cope with the changing external environment and the recent management transformation under the MEP, staff at HM and above are expected to be driving forces for change and to rally staff support and commitment for a new direction.

They will also be actively taking part in monitoring performance of their subordinates, setting service standards, and responding to the needs of the public in a more dynamic way. Priority of training will therefore be set on leadership development, team building, communication (including chairing meetings and handling the media), promotion of organizational vision, mission and core values, marketing and public relations, project management, project programming, new statutory requirements, contract procurement and management, facilities management, research and design.

15. Regular seminars and workshops focusing on specific issues will be organized for the target staff groups to -

- (a) provide experience sharing sessions on good management and housing practices;
- (b) help staff understand changes in policy, legislation and environmental issues and to interface housing services with other core business and disciplines.

16. In addition to attending local external programmes and secondment to central policy branches, appropriate overseas training programmes or duty visits will be arranged to enable staff to gain international and new perspectives, and experience in housing systems or management practices, of other countries. Such programmes should also provide a perspective beyond housing services.

17. The T & D Centre will liaise closely with the Management Branch to consider training needs arising from the merger of the estate management and maintenance services. Training needs arising therefrom will be given priority for implementation.

II. Interface Vocational Training with Management and General Training

18. Whilst vocational training focuses on job-specific issues, it is necessary to interface vocational training with supervisory/management development. It is important that staff see the need to enhance both professional skills and competence in personal effectiveness, team building, customer service, human resource management and finance management. It is also important that supporting skills such as use of computer software, language and communication skills are also enhanced and separate programmes are provided. Communication programmes will focus on conducting interviews, chairing

meetings, influence and negotiation, handling media skills. These programmes are particularly important for those with EMAC role.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

19. We have considered the resource implications of the proposed vocational training strategy for the Housing Manager grade. The approved training provision for the Housing Manager grade in 1997/98 is \$8.74M. The additional financial commitment (at \$1.4M for 1998/99) would come from additional places for professional training in Housing Management starting from 1998/99. To cater for other anticipated increase in training programmes, an annual increase of 10%, above the current approved provision is recommended over a three-year period. The projected training provisions for 1998/99 to 2000/2001 are -

1998/1999 -	\$10.38M	(including \$7.37M for professional training)
1999/2000 -	\$12.59M	(including \$9.28M for professional training)
2000/2001 -	\$14.76M	(including \$11.12M for professional training)

Specific annual training requirements will be worked out in the annual estimates with details of justifications. We will review our staffing positions in the light of additional programmes launched. There is scope for greater use of line managers as occasional speakers, and tertiary institutions for the longer programmes.

TRAINING EVALUATION & LEARNING APPLICATIONS

20. To ensure maximum return on training investment, three levels of evaluation will be applied -

- (i) End of course evaluation by course participants to assess effectiveness of the course and trainers.
- (ii) Course participants who have received training would conduct debriefing sessions for staff to share their experience with their colleagues and to offer suggestions on areas of training applications. They will be invited as speakers of seminars for more junior ranks to ensure more staff will benefit from their experience.

- (iii) Post-course follow-up interviews with course participants and their immediate supervisors for selected programmes. The emphasis here will be on transfer of learning to the workplace. Much work needs to be done in this area to develop the mindset of course participants and their supervisors to link training with enhancement of performance and housing services.

MONITORING FUTURE PROGRESS

21. The success of the vocational training strategy for HM grade will depend very much on careful planning, structured implementation, guided supervision and regular review. For this reason, we will monitor and report work progress regularly to the Branch Training Committee and provide an annual report on the implementation of training to the Training Board.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. At the Human Resources Committee Meeting to be held on 10 July 1997, Members will be invited to comment on and endorse the proposed vocational training strategy for the HM grade, as outlined in this paper.

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