

THE HONG KONG HOUSING AUTHORITY

Memorandum for the Human Resources Committee

**Vocational Training Strategy for Junior Grades in the Housing Class
(Other than the Housing Manager Grade)**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to outline a vocational training strategy for junior grades in the Housing Class (other than the Housing Manager grade) to meet training needs identified in a recent training review.

BACKGROUND

2. At the HRC meetings held on 23 January 97, 3 April 1997 and 10 July 1997 respectively, Members endorsed –

- (i) the management training & development strategy for HA staff (MEP/ HRM Paper 4/97);
- (ii) the vocational training strategy for New Development & Maintenance staff (MEP/HRM Paper 6/97); and
- (iii) the vocational training strategy for the Housing Manager (HM) grade (MEP/HRM Paper No. 11/97).

The proposed training strategy set out in this paper forms part of the overall training and development strategy of HA's Human Resource Management Plan.

OBJECTIVES OF TRAINING REVIEW

3. A training review for junior grades in the Housing Class was conducted between May to July 97. The objectives of the training review are to -

- (i) identify in depth the training needs of the target staff groups to help them cope with the changing operating environment;
- (ii) improve training & development for enhancing staff's performance, expanding and developing new skills to enable them to be more competent and versatile in meeting changing job needs and rising customer expectations;
- (iii) ensure training is relevant and practical, focusing on priority and the manageable, taking into consideration the identified needs of staff, their grade structure, organisational objectives and availability of training resources;
- (iv) recommend the way forward and set a framework for action to facilitate planning of T&D activities in the coming years; and
- (v) make training needs and planned actions better known to supervisors and staff.

PURVIEW

4. The target staff groups involve 6 junior grades in the Housing Class, i.e. **Estate Assistant (EA)**, **Foreman (FM)**, **Artisan (Art)**, **Workman (WK)**, **Welfare Worker (WW)** and **Customer Service Assistant (CSA)**, making a total of 4250 staff. They represent 55% of the total staff strength of the Housing Class. The staffing position of these 6 grades is set out in — **Appendix I**.

5. The **Ganger** and **Property Attendant** grades (3 Nos) have not been included in this training review due to their small size. Training needs for these 2 grades will be considered separately in the context of their phasing-out plan.

METHODOLOGY

6. Owing to the staff size, diversity in job nature and educational level of these staff groups, different training review methodologies were used to collect information and views from staff and their supervisors. Methodologies used are highlighted hereunder :-

- (i) **Questionnaire Survey** – for EA and FM grades; one for officers in the grades, and the other for their supervisors.
- (ii) **Job Analyses** – for all the 6 grades; with study and analysis of the key job functions and duty lists of each target grade and rank.
- (iii) **Focus Groups** – the training needs and priority identified were again validated by focus groups.
- (iv) **Senior Management/Grade Management & Staff Association Input** – the views of senior management and grade management, and suggestions of staff consultative meetings were also considered.
- (v) **MEP Ambassadors' Feedback** – views, suggestions and feedback from staff on training needs and improvement obtained through the MEP Ambassadors' goodwill visits were also considered.
- (vi) **Course Evaluation** – feedback and suggestions for training improvement obtained through debriefing sessions and post-course evaluation were also taken into consideration in revising training programmes and syllabi.

CHANGES TO THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

7. The work of the Housing Department is becoming more complex due to increasing demand for higher quality and more sophisticated property management. New initiatives and enhanced job roles are being introduced to staff in order to cope with both external demands and internal operational changes. The target staff groups are facing changes such as increased residents' participation in estate management, new building technologies and installations, and various privatisation initiatives. Training needs are identified as competency gaps brought on by changes in service focus as a result of the MEP, privatisation schemes, new legislation, advancement of information technology and the customer-focused service culture.

8. The recent reorganisation of the Department, the pilot merger of Estate Management and Maintenance functions in Management Branch and staff review will lead to changes in job roles for staff and will have implications on service and staff culture. Some key changes in job roles arising from staff review are highlighted in **Appendix II**.

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

9. A systematic and structured approach for staff training is welcomed by management as this will facilitate continuous service improvement, raise customer satisfaction on both staff and organisation performance and enhance staff's flexibility for deployment and their employability.

10. The Department is stepping up communication with staff to improve understanding of departmental issues and to seek views and suggestions for service improvement. It is also recognised that training can facilitate staff to take a more positive and active role in the Department's drive for continuous improvement and to prepare and cope better with changes.

RESPONSE FROM STAFF

11. Staff's response to the training review is generally positive. The survey has shown their great desire for better job knowledge and skills to support the MEP, enhance customer service and face competition in the industry.

OVER-EXPRESSION OF TRAINING NEEDS

12. A tendency for over-expression of training needs was observed in some grades. Expression of interests in Putonghua, Chinese computer software, interpersonal skills, supervisory and personal effectiveness training was quite common among the grades. Their job needs for such training have to be carefully managed and the level of training has to be pitched appropriately to be cost-effective.

COMPETENCY PROFILING

13. The competency profiling exercise for the 6 grades will be conducted in 1998/99. New areas of training needs may surface for the target staff groups as a result of the exercise. As there are impending changes in job roles linked to the staff review, the privatisation of management functions and restructuring of the Department, the competency profiling of these grades should be planned in step with the staff review exercise. More in-depth training strategies for the target staff groups will be established based on the results of the two exercises.

TRAINING REVIEW AND FINDINGS

14. The training review process, findings and recommendations for the 6 grades in question are detailed in the Report on Training Review - Housing Class (Other than HM Grades) (ref : HD1/560/86) to be published in January 98.

15. Training opportunities vary among the grades in question with resources concentrating on the higher ranks. The average training days for the target staff groups are 0.7 days in 96/97 and 0.69 days in 97/98, with the following concentration -

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Average Tr Days</u>	<u>Year</u>
WW	4	96/97
CEA	3.6	97/98 (Dec)
WK	-	

This situation should be improved as part of our departmental training strategy and to support the various departmental initiatives and change in service culture.

16. The training needs identified in the training review are summarised below -

- (i) Grade-specific training - To cope with new/changing job-roles and duties of the grades and to enhance service delivery.

Estate Assistant grade - Building maintenance technology (for SEA), contract supervision (including new Legislation on Security Guards), law enforcement under delegated

	authorities, emergency/conflict handling, knowledge on Building Management Ordinance (BMO) and Deed of Mutual Covenant (DMC)
Foreman grade	- Law enforcement under delegated authorities and emergency/conflict handling
Artisan grade ^{Note1}	- Training for new repair items, horticulture ^{Note2} , safety and health (including working in confined work area)
Customer Service Assistant grade	- Knowledge of housing services and procedures and common building defects, Putonghua and Chinese Word Processing
Welfare Worker grade	- First aid, counselling and communication with elderly people, identification of sickness symptoms of the elderly, operation of the emergency alarm system
Workman grade ^{Note1}	- Safety and health (including manual lifting)

(ii) General training

To support the Department's drive for the MEP and to increase staff's effectiveness at work, it has been identified that training for orientation to new service culture, staff integrity and discipline, communication (including Putonghua training for the FM & CSA grades), personal effectiveness skills and emergency handling should be strengthened/provided for the target staff groups. Supervisory management training for Chief Estate Assistant/Senior

^{Note1} Following a special review, the Artisans (Team Leaders) and a proportion of Workmen I working in Operations Division will be redeployed. Re-training will be considered for them if they are required to take up new or different job functions. This will be dealt with separately by a staff deployment plan.

^{Note2} The horticultural service in 12 estates is being contracted out under a trial scheme. With possible full launch of the scheme, horticulture training will have to be reviewed or scaled down .

Estate Assistant & Senior Foreman/Foreman should be emphasised to enhance their supervisory role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. To address the training gaps identified in the training review, plans for revision of existing training programmes for Artisans, Senior Estate Assistants and Foreman and introduction of additional programmes for the 6 grades have been worked out. The following training strategy is recommended -

(A) Overall Principles

Job-related training based on the job roles of the various grades is important to enable staff to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently and to cope with changing job needs. Priority of training should therefore be given to the grades assigned with new duties and job roles. Furthermore, training programmes have to be worked out by the T&D Centre in partnership with line management to ensure relevancy and effectiveness. Some identified core skills of the concerned grades are set out in **Appendix III**.

(B) Training Priorities & Focus

In view of the large population of the target grades (some 4250 staff) and implications on training resources, it is recommended to set the priorities and focus of training as follows -

(i) Job-related training

In support of the Department's drive for management enhancement, job-related training focusing on improving staff's performance at work and enhancing overall service delivery should be accorded priority in the next three years. The grade specific training as highlighted in para. 16(i) are required to raise staff's competencies at work. Training roadmap and programmes for the target grades are mapped out in **Appendix IV**.

(ii) General training

Since the target grades are the front-line staff who have frequent direct contact with customers, customer service, staff integrity and discipline should be accorded priority to help uplift customer service and enhance the image of the Department as a whole.

Training on personal effectiveness should follow as this would enhance staff's competencies at work and to make staff take responsibility for more efficient and effective service delivery. For staff of the CEA/SEA & Sr. FM/FM grades who have a supervisory role, training on supervisory management should be accorded priority in 1998.

(C) An Integrated Approach to Training

- (i) In the design and delivery of new training programmes, consideration will be given to whether the programmes should be run in-house, involving line-managers as speakers where appropriate, or be outsourced to other training providers to make best use of training resources. Moreover, training with multi-disciplinary attendance will be arranged, whenever possible and practical, and more creative/imaginative training methodologies will be introduced instead of the traditional didactic approach. Initially, it is planned that out-reaching programmes conducted on district basis will be organised to enable multi-disciplinary attendance of staff within the same management district.

- (ii) As general training is an important driver to promote quality management and to enhance performance, it is proposed that for grades currently undergoing review of job descriptions, general training will be delivered first to set their mind on prevailing departmental issues and coping with change, with emphasis on new service culture, teamwork, communication skills etc.
- (iii) It is also proposed to expand staff's learning horizon, broaden their sights and step up communication with outside organisations. An example is to arrange visits to outside institutions with reputation for service excellence.

IMPLEMENTATION

18. The Report on Training Review was presented to the respective Business Directors and the Branch Training Committee for endorsement on 9 January, 1998. Recommended training roadmap and proposed new programmes (**Appendix IV**) will also be presented to staff in February, 1998. Having considered the scale of the training requirements, resource and other operational constraints, existing programmes will be revised and up-dated, and the following new programmes will be designed and implemented in stages from April, 1998 over a 3-year period -

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Target start date</u>
Building Maintenance Technology for SEA	5-day	April 98
Knowledge of Housing Services & Procedures and Common Building Defects for CSA ^{Note3}	1-day	April 98
Staff Integrity & Discipline for all junior grades	1-day	April 98
Chinese Word Processing for CSA ^{Note3}	1-day	May 98
Supervisory Management Course for CEA/SEA/Sr. FM/FM	6-day	June 98
Contract Supervision and BMO/DMC for EA	1-day	June 98

^{Note3} Programmes to be delivered fully to the grade within 1998/99.

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Target start date</u>
grade		
Customer Service & Teamwork for EA, Artisan, WW & WK	1-day	June 98
Top-up Craft Course for Estate Artisan, CITA	(details to be worked out)	July 98
Practical Putonghua for CSA and FM	- ditto -	Sept 98
Law Enforcement under Delegated Authorities and Handling Conflict/Emergency for EA & FM	1-day	Sept 98
Training for WK on Handling Conflict/Emergency, Safety and Health	1-day	Sept 98

The aim is to provide at least 2 training days for the target staff groups in 1998/99 and 2.5 training days in 1999/2000.

EVALUATION & MONITORING

19. To ensure maximum return on training investment, end of course evaluation will be conducted to assess effectiveness of both the courses and the trainers, and to collect feedback on possible areas for improvement. For selected programmes, post-course follow-up interviews with course participants and their immediate supervisors will also be conducted. The emphasis will be on transfer of learning to the workplace. In addition, assessment of the effectiveness of the training provided will also be gauged against the ability of the Business Branches to achieve the targets set out in the annual business plans.

20. The training programmes will be carefully planned and designed for the most cost-effective delivery and will tie in with other communication strategy or roadshows to be launched by Business Branches. We will also closely monitor the new/revised training requirements in the light of further changes to departmental re-structuring and staff deployment plan. The progress and effectiveness of the training plan will be closely monitored and reported to the Branch Training Committee regularly. The implementation plan will be updated annually in the light of further operational changes and reviewed in 2000/01.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

21. We have considered the resource implications of the recommendations. Since most of the additional training programmes will be conducted by in-house trainers or line managers, the programmes can be absorbed by existing staff or secondment of trainers from Business Branches. Financial resources will be contained within the overall training investment on staff.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. At the Human Resources Committee Meeting to be held on 5 February 1998, Members will be invited to comment on and endorse the recommendations of training for the junior grades in the Housing Class as outlined in para 17 to 20.

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