

Chairman's Foreword

Dear Friends,

The 21st century witnesses the coming of a new era. Fundamental change has occurred to the manpower demand as our society, economy and technology rapidly evolve. To cope with this changing environment, the Employees Retraining Board (the "ERB") has prepared this Consultative Document with a view to outlining our thoughts on our new directions for your consideration. We sincerely invite your input on how we can realize the utmost benefit of investing in Hong Kong's human capital with the available resources.

Over the years, the ERB had been committed to serving the unemployed aged 30 or above and with an education attainment of secondary three or below. In accordance with the decision of the Chief Executive in Council in October 2007, our service targets have been expanded since 1st December, 2007 to cover those Hong Kong residents at age 15 or above and with education up to sub-degree level. As we open up our training courses to individuals meeting the new eligibility criteria, our training portfolio will have to be re-examined and gradually expanded to cover new service targets and new tasks with much wider scope, including manpower training and continuous upgrading for people in different trades. We are stepping onto a new era.

As the Chairman of the ERB, I together with all the other Board Members fully support this change and believe that this is essential and promptly answering to the needs of the society. The Chief Executive pointed out in his 2007-08 Policy Address that one of his principal goals is : *"Promoting social harmony under the concept of helping people to help themselves:.....developing soft infrastructure on all fronts including expanding retraining programmes to help the middle class and the grassroots upgrade their skills - this will improve their competitiveness in an ever-evolving labour market."*

In the past, we aimed to provide timely skill training for the unemployed with the clear objective of helping them getting jobs. Through active sourcing of potential job markets and upgrading of quality of training, we had constantly strived to expand job opportunities for our graduates and improve our service provision. **Yet the services worked only as much as to solve the short-term employment problems of individuals, and there was lack of consideration for sustainability and continuous development of individuals in a holistic manner. Given the rapid development of our technology today, this consideration is important and individuals would need to be able to pursue life-long learning, and to be able to acquire knowledge in breadth as well as depth. Manpower development should become the perspective in the design of training.** For this reason, it is necessary for the ERB to adjust its service orientation and “sustainability” should be the key. Thus while we embark on a new journey by having our scope and target group expanded, **we shall focus on fostering of sustainable employment, greater competitiveness, and upward mobility for our working population, so that our economy and our work-force would thrive in the momentum of globalisation.**

To better reflect the new mission and scope of services of the ERB, we propose to rename the Employees Retraining Scheme as “Manpower Development Scheme”. Semantically, the term “manpower development” denotes “training” as well as “retraining”. In essence, **the ERB shall operate the “Manpower Development Scheme” in offering vocational training for the unemployed. We shall also provide skill upgrading courses for the employed and launch training on generic skills (including betterment of personal attributes and foundation skills) to meet the needs of the working population. Progression ladders will be mapped out for fostering development and nurturing of manpower among different trades.** Considering the continuous development and improvement of our services, I believe that the ERB will be able to provide a more comprehensive mechanism for manpower training and development in time. This may also push the development of manpower to a higher level.

This Consultative Document provides a platform to induce discussion over the future directions for the ERB. I cordially invite you to study this document and honour us with your invaluable views. Let us work together for the betterment of manpower development in Hong Kong, that we may instil a more proactive community to embrace all kinds of challenges ahead.

Michael Tien Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Chairman,
Employees Retraining Board