

Commission on Poverty

Training, Retraining and Continuing Education - Training and Employment Opportunities in the Hotel Industry

PURPOSE

To facilitate Members' discussion on training initiatives to assist the middle-aged and low-skilled unemployed, this paper provides some background information on the potential job opportunities in the hotel industry, as well as the relevant training and retraining efforts.

BACKGROUND

2. During our previous discussion on assisting the unemployed to move from "welfare to self-reliance", some CoP Members noted that the growth of the tourism and hotel industries should provide potential job opportunities for low-skilled workers, and suggested the Government to take this into account in designing employment assistance and training programmes. We have explored the subject subsequently with the two hotel associations in Hong Kong¹, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Women's Commission (WoC).

MANPOWER DEMAND OF THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

3. The hotel industry is one of the key growth industries in Hong Kong. There were 26 348 persons working in the hotel industry as at March 2006². The Hong Kong Tourism Board estimated the number of hotels would increase from 117 as at March 2006 to 155 in 2010.³ 7 700 new jobs are expected to be created in the hotel industry by 2010⁴.

¹ The Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners, and the Hong Kong Hotels Association.

² Table 6, Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies Statistics, Census and Statistics Department.

³ Report on "Hotel Supply Situation - as at March 2006" produced by the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

⁴ The employment opportunities were estimated based on the number of staff to hotel room ratio obtained from the report of "Hotel Supply Situation - as at March 2006" produced by the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

4. The continued development of the tourism and hotel industries as well as the labour-intensive nature of the hotel business offers positive future job growth. Nevertheless, according to the hotel associations, the actual demand for low-skilled workers should be qualified by the following factors -

- (a) Adjustment in the number of new hotel projects – the projected increase in the number of hotels should be qualified by an increasing number of alternative accommodation (such as guesthouses, service apartments and hostels) which do not require a high staff-to-room ratio. The recent increasing demand for commercial premises might also postpone some of the hotel development projects; and
- (b) Staff requirements – Besides having good soft skills and a positive work attitude, the hotel industry increasingly looks for frontline staff who are multi-skilled in order to deliver flexible and customer-oriented services to guests (e.g. front-desk, telephone operators, concierge). “Back of the house” jobs which have less interaction with guests (room attendants, cleansing and maintenance staff) may be more suitable to retrainees with low-skills and low-education.

TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM AND HOTEL INDUSTRIES

5. There are a wide variety of catering, tourism and hospitality training places offered by the tertiary institutions, trade associations, including the Vocational Training Council (VTC), the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) and the Employees’ Retraining Board (ERB). Amongst them, training bodies under the ERB provide training courses most relevant to the middle-aged and low-skilled unemployed, e.g. housekeeping/room attendants⁵. In the past two months, the ERB introduced standardized courses on hotel room attendant and hotel public area cleaner to capture the job opportunities in the hotel industry.

6. While the job opportunities suitable for the “difficult-to-employ” might not be as rosy as it appears, the ERB will continue to work closely with the hotel associations on the content of the re-training programmes so as to ensure the courses continue to meet the needs of the hotel industry. The ERB stands ready to design tailor-made re-training programmes upon request of the employers to suit their specific needs.

⁵ In the past few years, the ERB offered a training course on “Housekeeper/Room Attendant”(酒店房務員). The number of graduates in 2004-05 and 2005-06 were 1 364 and 2 080 respectively, and the respective placement rates were 81% and 83%.

7. In addition, during the discussion with the hotel associations, it was noted that the following training/re-training measures could be strengthened to assist the unemployed in entering the industry -

(i) Job Skills Enhancement through Intensive Employment Assistance Project (IEAP) Operating Agencies

8. According to the SWD, some IEAP operating agencies are referring their IEAP participants to some hotels for job trials. It was noted that jobs like overnight cleaning are suitable for the low-skilled unemployed Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients when they first re-entered the labour market. In this regard, the SWD would work closely with the IEAP operating agencies to provide more suitable training to enhance the skill level of the IEAP participants and to facilitate their finding suitable jobs in the hotel industry.

(ii) Job Placement Opportunities for the Unemployed

9. The hotel associations expressed that training and employee turnover was a major cost item in the industry. While the associations could encourage their members to employ more “difficult-to-employ”, it was noted that incentives from the Government, e.g. the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged and the Work Trial Scheme (WTS) of the Labour Department (LD), could help encourage more placement and work trial opportunities for the middle-aged and low-skilled unemployed. The LD will continue to promote these two schemes to the hotel industry. The ERB would explore with the LD as to whether the retrainees could join the schemes so as to enhance their employment prospects in the hotel industry.