

Press Release

The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers' response to "Manpower Forecast for Hong Kong Construction Industry"

(Hong Kong, 13 February 2023) The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers ("HKIE") noted and welcomed the Construction Industry Council's ("CIC") new release — "Manpower Forecast for Hong Kong Construction Industry" ("the Forecast"). The projections therein, by providing the industry with potent and objective data, serve as a sound basis for estimating the manpower needs imposed by the future construction volume on the engineering and construction industries, thereby benefiting their future development. To grapple with the shortage of talents, especially given many large-scale infrastructure projects in the pipeline, the HKIE agrees that it is necessary to strengthen the promotion of innovative technologies and other emerging construction technologies, streamline vetting and approval processes, improve efficiency, and , simultaneously with all these, attract new talents and retain existing manpower for the construction and engineering industries.

According to CIC's figures, a shortage of about 6,000 to 6,500 professionals in 2027 is predicted; among them, engineers in professional disciplines including civil, electrical/mechanical, geotechnical, structural and environmental figure prominently. The HKIE estimates that the shortage of engineers will average around 3,000 in the five-year period between 2023 and 2027, whereas the manpower gap for skilled/semi-skilled workers will reach 35,000 - 40,000 in 2027. It should however be noted that, in the aforementioned figures, the effects of the various measures to increase supply or reduce demand of manpower have not been taken into account.

The HKIE is of the view that the Forecast is consistent with, and provides quantitative data that support, the "Research on Augmenting Engineer Manpower to Cope with the Foreseeable Surge in Demand" published by the Institution in April 2022. We believe that the use of innovative technologies, crafts, and materials, together with measures to increase productivity and reduce manpower demand, not only can alleviate the problem of manpower shortages, but also provides an important direction for the future development of the construction industry. The relevant measures are gradually taking effect.

As suggested in the HKIE's Research Report published last April, "generating supply" and "managing demand" will help the industry in coping with the challenges brought on by the impacts of increasing construction volume and the decline in the overall working population, paving the way for the sustainable development of the industry. In terms of "generating supply", it is essential to review the secondary school curriculum as well as university places and admissions, in order to attract students to enrol in STEAM- and engineering-related programmes. The HKIE is co-organising the "Engineers on Campus" programme with the Education Bureau, assisting schools in

organising STEAM activities. In addition, the HKIE is organising the “Hong Kong Engineers Week 2023” (<https://hkengineersweek.com>) from late-February to early-March, showcasing the diversity of engineering disciplines, and the broad scope and challenging nature of engineers’ work to the public, especially the younger generation. It must be noted, however, that it takes a considerable amount of time to nurture a professional engineer. Apart from strengthening training at the local level, the HKIE recommends attracting overseas and mainland engineers and engineering graduates to work in Hong Kong, thereby boosting the supply of engineering professionals on a short-term basis. Besides, the Institution is actively participating in the “Construction Hong Kong” campaign that is currently being implemented by the industry to attract new blood to the engineering and construction sector.

As for “managing demand”, the impact of the retirement wave could be alleviated by improving working conditions, streamlining miscellaneous administrative and approval procedures, and retaining talents at all levels. As expounded in the research report “Recommendations on Streamlining Building Works and Infrastructure Development Processes” issued by the HKIE last September, excessive administrative and approval procedures would add pressure to manpower demand. We recommend, on the premise that the engineering quality and safety are not compromised, streamlining the approval processes. In addition to being a “regulator”, relevant approving authorities can also act as a “facilitator” (while complying with the principle of fairness) so that higher efficiency and productivity may be achieved with limited resources.

The HKIE stands ready to work with the Government and the industry to formulate strategies that work for and benefit the engineering and construction industry. A multi-pronged approach that combines strengthening training, promoting the use of innovative technologies within the industry, and importing non-local resources on reasonable grounds will help to meet the manpower demand in the future. A number of large-scale infrastructure projects are underway, and the engineering industry will continue to make professional contributions towards the construction of a better Hong Kong in which the society’s needs for housing and economic development are met.

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