

II. Employment

In the past year, we have been working on 31 pledges, of which :

- we have completed 13;
- we are on schedule on ten;
- one is under review; and
- we are pressing ahead with seven on-going commitments.

The following sets out the detailed report for each main programme area.

Vocational Education and Employees Retraining

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>	<i>Present Position</i>
Action Completed		
1997	1. To focus the Employees Retraining Scheme (ERS) on providing training for the unemployed aged 30 or above who have received no more than lower secondary education and on the employed who need basic skills to sustain their employability.	<p>A review of the ERS was completed in June 1997, following which, ERS has been targeted primarily at the unemployed aged 30 or above who have no more than lower secondary education.</p> <p>In the light of rising unemployment, this age and educational requirement has, since early 1998, been relaxed so that more unemployed can benefit from the ERS. Nevertheless those aged 30 or above with less than lower secondary education remains our priority target group.</p> <p>Part-time or evening courses teaching basic skills such as computer use and languages are being provided for the employed. Skills-upgrading courses have been transferred to the Vocational Training Council (VTC) to ensure a more cost-effective use of training resources.</p>

- 1997 2. The Employees' Retraining Board (ERB) to re-structure the retraining programme into specially designed and structured packages of job-oriented intensive courses, aimed at helping retrainees secure jobs.

ERB has, in consultation with the major training bodies, developed an integrated package of job-oriented intensive courses. Four pilot training courses have been launched. They comprise training on job-search and job-specific skills and one-year post-employment follow-up services.

Action in Progress : On Schedule

- 1997 3. To draw up a timetable, together with the VTC, for the phased implementation of the recommendations arising from the strategic and organisational review of the VTC to ensure that VTC will become more flexible and responsive to the changing demands of the labour market. Thereafter to work with the VTC to :

- strengthen vocational education and training as an attractive alternative route to traditional secondary and higher education;
- introduce a quality assurance system into the VTC;
- strengthen the VTC Council and senior management;

The VTC has come up with a strategic proposal to integrate by 2001-2002 its existing two Technical Colleges (TCs) and seven Technical Institutes (TIs) into one coherent management, academic and training structure, to enhance VTC's cost effectiveness and responsiveness to changing market needs.

This can be achieved through the integration of the TCs and TIs. Craft courses are being revamped to make them more effective and attractive to trainees. More traineeships are being implemented in commercial subjects.

A consultant has been appointed to study the feasibility of introducing a quality assurance scheme in the VTC.

The VTC Council and senior management have been strengthened by the appointment of new members to the Council (many of the members are prominent figures in their respective sectors of industry or commerce) and by a reorganisation of senior management.

- identify a new methodology so that improved labour market analysis can be carried out;
A study will be conducted on labour market analysis.
- identify, in the light of the resource review, those disciplines which are in least demand by students and/or employers, and those which are in great demand, and redeploy resources where appropriate;
This will proceed after the study on labour market analysis has been completed.
- modernise the training equipment in the training centres;
Funds for modernising the training equipment are being sought.
- improve teaching equipment in the technical institutes to satisfy the most up-to-date course requirements;
Funds for modernising the training equipment are being sought.
- enhance the VTC's existing information technology infrastructure ;
and
Funds are being sought for modernising VTC's IT equipment.
- To respond rapidly to the needs of the community (to help ease unemployment).
The VTC has implemented a one-year Certificate course in Vocational Studies for 1 000 secondary school graduates. It has also organised a joint programme with ERB to offer a special nine-month Certificate course in Skills Training in service industries for 1 000 unemployed.

- 1997 4. To ensure the smooth implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of the ERS to ensure that the scheme is flexible and responsive to market needs.
- The recommendations arising from the ERS are being implemented. Progress with individual commitments are reported under individual pledges.
- 1997 5. The ERB to evaluate the number and composition of the training bodies with a view to assessing their performance and quality and improving their effectiveness.
- ERB has reviewed the performance of the approved training bodies. Five training bodies which have been inactive have been deleted from the list of approved training bodies.
- In the meantime, ERB will develop an evaluation framework for reviewing and monitoring the performance of training bodies and retraining programmes.
- 1997 6. The ERB to introduce a placement-tied, performance-based payment system for the training bodies.
- At present, training is placement-focused, which means that funding will only be provided for retraining courses with satisfactory placement results. Full-time courses are normally required to attain a placement rate of around 70%. ERB has devised a more elaborate performance evaluation criteria for training courses. This will form the basis of a placement-tied, performance-based payment system for its training bodies to be drawn up in consultation with them.

Construction Industry Training

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>	<i>Present Position</i>
Action Completed		
1997	1. To maximise the capacity of Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA) in providing trained manpower to meet the needs of the construction industry arising from the expanded housing programme by increasing its training/retraining capacity for adult workers by 484 annually to help meet the labour shortages in trades such as bar-bending, formwork carpentry, plastering and bricklaying.	During the 1997-1998 training year, CITA increased the capacity of its various short-term courses by 1 277 places to meet the labour shortages in particular trades in the industry.
1997	2. To have CITA closely monitor the training needs of the industry and respond positively by increasing its flexibility to train more workers, and by collaborating with the Government, the VTC, the ERB and other tertiary/educational institutions.	CITA has been monitoring closely the training needs of the construction industry in close liaison with other concerned parties. In response to demand, CITA increased its training capacity for new workers for the construction industry from 3 653 in the 1996-1997 training year to 4 950 places in the 1997-1998 training year. The training capacity for in-service workers has also been increased from 19 110 in the 1996-1997 training year to 53 989 in the 1997-1998 training year.

Good progress has been made with the following commitments in the past year. We will continue to work on them on an on-going basis.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>
1997	3. To have CITA enhance its promotion efforts to attract more new arrivals to take up construction training courses.

- 1997 4. To have CITA provide better retraining opportunities for adults displaced from other industries to facilitate their joining the construction industry.
- 1997 5. To have CITA improve the retention rate of its graduates within the construction industry.
- 1996 6. To require, in co-operation with Works Bureau, public works contractors to provide specific induction safety training for all construction workers. From October 1995, all new government construction contracts have included safety training requirements. The Housing Authority and works departments have also agreed to provide financial incentives to construction workers who attend safety training courses offered by accredited bodies.

Employment Services

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>	<i>Present Position</i>
Action Completed		
1997	1. To complete the review of the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) in 1997 to see whether it has met its intended objectives and the changing needs of the economy.	The Government has completed the review of the scheme and announced the results on 16 December 1997. It has been concluded that the SLS should be allowed to continue to operate largely as at present, and be subject to an annual review. The recommendations were implemented in April 1998.
1997	2. To conduct a study of the manpower needs of the various construction trades to be completed in 1997.	The study was completed in December 1997. We have worked out projections for the total labour requirement of the construction industry in the coming five years and have identified trade areas which have a heavy manpower demand.

- 1997 3. To complete the computerisation of the Local Employment Service by early 1998 to improve employment services to job-seekers. It enables faster retrieval of vacancy and job-seekers information, more effective job matching and more comprehensive data analysis.
- The computerisation project has been completed and was brought into operation on 1 April 1998.
- 1997 4. To run the employment and guidance centre newly set up in Shaukeiwan which provides a comprehensive range of employment services and guidance tailor-made for new arrivals in order to help new arrivals better informed and prepared when entering the labour market.
- In the 11-month period since its opening, the Centre has organised 104 briefings on employment for new arrivals. 3 612 persons have used the Centre's services. Of the new arrivals who sought jobs through the Centre, 47.2% were successfully placed in employment.

Action in Progress : On Schedule

- 1997 5. To set up a working group comprising representatives of the relevant training bodies, trade associations, labour unions and government departments to identify how best to meet the manpower shortage in the textiles and clothing industry. It will identify how best to increase the local labour supply to the industry to take advantage of the quota allocation to Hong Kong for the next five years through training and retraining.
- The working group was set up in September 1997. To meet the demand of the industry, the Clothing Industry Training Authority has increased the number of retraining courses at the operative level for sewing and linking. About 500 retrainees have graduated from these courses.

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| 1997 | 6. | To plan to set up one more employment and guidance centre in 1998-1999 to further improve our employment services for the new arrivals. | A suitable location in Kowloon for this second centre has been identified. Work to prepare for its opening by end 1998 is in progress. |
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Action in Progress : Under Review

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| 1997 | 7. | To complete the review of the pilot scheme on the entry of professionals from the Mainland in 1997 in order to devise effective and appropriate measures to meet the needs of employers to import professionals from the Mainland. | The Government has completed the review of the Pilot Scheme which came to an end in 1997. It is considered not appropriate to revive the Pilot Scheme for the time being, pending a further review of the impact of the on-going economic adjustment process and slackening labour market on local middle managers and administrators. |
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Good progress has been made with the following commitment in the past year. We will continue to work on it on an on-going basis.

Year

Pledge

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| 1997 | 8. | To set up a working group, led by EMB, to plan for the expansion of training and retraining programmes for the construction industry. In the light of the Working Group's deliberations, to consider taking specific measures, including labour importation, to ensure an adequate supply of labour for this industry over the next decade. |
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Labour Relations

Year

Pledge

Present Position

Action Completed

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| 1997 | 1. | To extend the Labour Department's conciliation service to deal with complaints related to age discrimination in the employment field. | The conciliation service of the Labour Relations Service of the Labour Department has been extended to deal with these complaints since October 1997. |
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Action in Progress : On Schedule

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| 1997 | 2. | To conduct a review of employment conditions of live-in domestic helpers in Hong Kong with a view to assessing whether special arrangements should be provided to regulate their employment. | We have consulted domestic helpers, employers and concerned associations with a view to completing the review within 1998. |
| 1997 | 3. | To review the provisions on sickness benefit and lay-offs under the Employment Ordinance to see whether further improvements should be made. | The review is in progress and will be completed within 1998. |

Good progress has been made with the following commitment in the past year. We will continue to work on it on an on-going basis.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>
1997	4. To strengthen promotion of good communication between employers and employees, as well as direct and voluntary consultation at the enterprise level on employment issues.

Employees' Rights and Benefits

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>	<i>Present Position</i>
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Action Completed

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| 1997 | 1. | To improve benefits payable under the Pneumoconiosis Ex-Gratia Scheme to pneumoconiotics assessed before 1981. | Improvements to the Scheme were implemented on 1 January 1998. |
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- 1997 2. To amend the Occupational Deafness (Compensation) Ordinance to implement the recommendations arising from the comprehensive review of the Occupational Deafness Compensation Scheme so as to provide better protection for employees suffering from occupational deafness.
- The Occupational Deafness (Compensation) (Amendment) Ordinance 1998 which sought to provide better protection for employees suffering from occupational deafness came into effect on 6 March 1998.
- 1996 3. To promote employees' rights and benefits by improving our information services to the workforce on protection of wages and employment rights, compensation for injury at work, employment services and job market information in 1997.
- We have introduced various measures to improve information services to the workforce, which include the enhanced 24-hour General Enquiry Telephone Service; launching of the Labour Department Home Page on the Internet; publicity materials on employees' rights and benefits in different languages; a new, on-line integrated computer system to facilitate enquiries from injured employees; mobile exhibitions to disseminate information on the vacancies under the SLS and employment services; updated information sheets capturing latest information about the employment market, etc.

Action in Progress : On Schedule

- 1997 4. To complete the review on the working hours of our workforce with a view to determining whether new regulations on this aspect should be introduced.
- We have conducted a survey on the pattern of working time arrangements among our workforce, and made an assessment of the economic implications, as well as studying the experience of other places. We are considering the best way of taking forward the review.

Occupational Safety and Health

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>	<i>Present Position</i>
Action Completed		
1996	1. To launch a new publicity strategy in late 1996 emphasising a healthy lifestyle and good habits in the workplace.	We continue to disseminate information on occupational safety and health through various channels, including TV announcements, advertisements in public transport stations and carriers, public seminars and safety and health bulletins and guidance materials. Publication stands have been placed at major business outlets to facilitate the distribution of safety and health pamphlets.
Action in Progress : On Schedule		
1997	2. To continue to enhance the safety and health standards at work through the introduction of new legislation, including : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – mandatory safety training for those working in the construction and container handling industries; – the implementation of a safety management system in selected industrial undertakings; – better protection for those working in confined spaces and at heights; and – medical examinations for those required to handle hazardous substances and agents at work. 	We plan to introduce the legislation into the Legislative Council in the current legislative session.

Good progress has been made with the following commitment in the past year. We will continue to work on it on an on-going basis.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pledge</i>
1996	3. To actively promote the Occupational Safety Charter through encouraging voluntary subscription to the Charter by employer and employee bodies, safety practitioners and businesses. To arrange publicity such as newspaper and TV advertisements, videos, posters, guidance booklets and supporting materials.