

Letterhead of Federation of Hong Kong Industries

23 March 2001

Mrs Sharon Tong
Clerk to the Manpower Panel
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

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Dear Mrs Tong,

Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme

Thank you for your letter dated 16 March 2001 inviting our views on the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme. We are pleased to offer the following comments for the consideration of the Panel.

First and foremost, we welcome the introduction of the Scheme, as it would allow companies to recruit skilled Mainland professionals for the development of their business. We believe putting in place such a scheme is necessary if we are to maintain our economic development.

According to a Government manpower projection survey, Hong Kong faces a substantial under-supply of graduates from local universities; and will not be able to meet the manpower needs of its expanding IT and financial service industries. It is our view that if this shortage is not addressed swiftly, Hong Kong's competitiveness would be severely undermined and our long-term economic development hindered. In our view, the relaxation of the stringent immigration restrictions on Mainland professionals is a right and necessary step to address this problem. The importation of skilled Mainland professionals would remove the present manpower bottleneck, and assist Hong Kong in its quest to be the information technology hub of Asia, as well as maintain its position as an international financial centre.

In fact, the Government's existing immigration policy has already allowed companies in Hong Kong to employ foreign professionals from most other countries, provided they possess skills or knowledge not readily available in and of value to Hong Kong. An important safeguard of the admission of foreign professionals scheme is that employers must first be unable to fill vacancies locally. So far, this liberal policy has been functioning very well. The economy has benefited from this

policy as imported professionals have filled manpower gaps which would otherwise have seen many organisations relocate their operations to other places due to an insufficient supply of local talents.

As the policy to admit professionals from outside Hong Kong has been in place for many years and proved to be beneficial, we do not see any reason why it should not be applied to professionals from the Mainland - Hong Kong must not adopt a discriminatory approach towards Mainland professionals. Indeed, many Mainland professionals possess skills and knowledge unavailable locally and overseas. To address the current immigration restrictions placed on Mainland professionals would help solve the immediate manpower needs of employers when looking for desired talents. This is particularly important as many local companies are planning new ventures to capitalise on the vast business opportunities expected after China's WTO accession.

Under the Government's proposal, initially the Scheme would only cover professionals in the IT and financial services. The Federation considers that to start with this narrow scope is acceptable; however, we strongly recommend an early review of the Scheme so that other industries with skill shortages can be included as soon as practicable. The Federation also stresses the importance of implementing a "hurdle-free" application procedure for the new scheme so that the failure of the 1994 Pilot Scheme on Entry of Mainland Professionals is not repeated.

To conclude, the Federation welcomes the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme and agrees with the Government that the import of Mainland professionals will help generate new job opportunities at the sub-professional levels. The Scheme should not hamper employment opportunities of the local workforce; on the contrary, with the enhancement of Hong Kong's economy more vacancies will be opened as a result.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Y. Y. Tang
Chairman

c.c. Hon. Kenneth Ting