

Construction Workers Registration Bill

Submission to Legco Bills Committee by HKCA

Introduction

The HKCA is glad that Members of the Legislative Council generally support the proposed registration system and would like the registration scheme to be implemented as early as possible. It is confident that the scheme will bring quality improvement to construction benefiting the society at large.

As Members of the Bills Committee have concern regarding the proposed exemption criteria for the “senior workers” the HKCA would like to take this opportunity to explain that the proposed exemption criteria and requirements are reasonable and should not be relaxed.

Reasons for Supporting the Proposed Exemption Criteria

The main objective of the proposed scheme is to ensure the quality of construction workers through assessment and certification of their skill levels. To achieve this effect, an objective and impartial trade test is the proper and preferred way to go. It is also a fair method by which workers are graded according their skill levels.

The HKCA considers the proposed criteria and requirements for obtaining registration for the “senior workers” reasonable and not at all demanding. Our opinion is based on the following observations:

1. The Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA) has been running the Trade Testing Scheme for many years. As of the 15th May 2003, 50,699 workers have passed the Trade/Intermediate Trade Tests (26,713 for Trade Tests and 23,986 for Intermediate Trade Tests). In addition, 20,390 workers have passed the Certificate Tests for Crane Operators/Loadshifting Machinery Operators. This means that the majority of construction workers have already acquired the required registration qualification.
2. If such a large number of workers have already acquired the qualification through Trade Testing we should encourage the remaining others to do so as well. This does not only conform to the objective of the proposed scheme, it also show our respect to it. The large number of trade-tested workers also shows that the skilled workers are not afraid of taking on the challenge of the test.

3. We think the trade-tested workers would not accept a large number of other workers joining their ranks through a less stringent requirement of admission. It is unfair and disrespect to them if we allow it to happen.
4. We consider the proposed ten-year-working-experience requirement of the “senior workers” exemption criteria reasonable. Firstly, we do not believe many workers not having gone through a well-structured training course can achieved a high level of skilfulness in a working period less than ten years. Our Association has originally proposed that the exemption should only be granted to workers who had served 15 years in the industry and this period was negotiated down to ten years by the Labour Unions. Secondly, for the gifted workers who have acquired a high level of skill in a short period they should take the Trade Tests and pass them without difficulty.
5. We back the proposed “senior worker” exemption criteria because we understand that for the elder workers Trade Tests might be an insurmountable psychological barrier to them because of their age. It is for this reason and not for opening a back door for everyone, hence degrading the standard of the scheme, that we agree to exempt long service workers the trade testing admission requirement.

Conclusion

We request the Bills Committee to support the exemption criteria and requirements for the “senior workers” proposed by the Administration. It is unanimously agreed by the Working Group of this Scheme, which consists of representatives from the whole industry including contractors associations, labour unions and government department. This is the way to go to maintain the standard and integrity of the scheme. If we lower the requirement to less than ten-year experience it will be unfair to the trade-tested workers and degrading the standard of the scheme.

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