VTC

Manpower Update Report

Print Media and Publishing Industries

2019

Print Media and Publishing Training Board

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Contents

Introduction

Background

The Print Media and Publishing Training Board (PPTB) of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) was appointed by the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to be responsible for, among other duties, determining the manpower situation and training needs of the industry. Following a rationalisation exercise in 2017, new approach for conducting manpower survey is adopted to enhance the effectiveness and better reflect the dynamic of the manpower situation. The new approach is to conduct full manpower survey for each industry once every four years, supplemented by periodic information updates through focus group meeting and desk research.

The PPTB completed its latest full manpower survey in 2016. Two manpower update reports would be prepared during the period between 2018 and 2020. The PPTB conducted a focus group meeting of the print media and publishing industries on 14 November 2018 to collect views about the latest manpower situation and training needs from industry practitioners.

Desk research had also been done to capture recruitment information including job vacancies of principal jobs, qualification requirements and salary offered in the industry for the period from July 2017 to April 2018.

This is the first manpower update report of the print media and publishing industries which mainly covers the findings obtained from the focus group meetings, supplemented by the information acquired from desk research for reference purpose.

Objectives

The objectives of the manpower update are as follows:

(i)   To examine the latest trends and development;
(ii)   To explore the job market and training needs;
(iii)   To recognise the recruitment challenges; and
(iv)   To identify the job requirements.

Methodology

Overview

To collect a holistic manpower information of the print media and publishing industries, a new approach is adopted by the PPTB through conducting full manpower survey, supplemented by periodic update through focus group meetings and desk research. For the purpose of this update report, only focus group discussions and desk research will be covered.

Focus Group Meeting

The focus group meetings are intended to collect experts' view on the latest trend and development of the industry's manpower, training needs and recruitment difficulties, etc. The focus group members are representatives from the print media and publishing industries, including:

Print media
1. Newspaper printing
2. Job printing
3. Packaging printing

Publishing
1. Trade book publishing
2. Textbook publishing
3. Publishing enterprise involved in digital publishing

A focus group meeting was conducted by an experienced consultant with eight industry representatives on 14 November 2018 to discuss the general questions and probed into more specific context to collect in-depth information on relevant topics in the discussion guide.
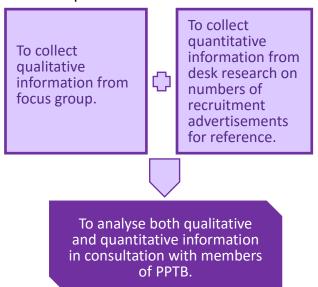
Desk Research

Manpower information covering the period between July 2017 and April 2018 was collected through desk research by quarter. The information includes the number of job advertisements, posts' required competency, qualification and experience, market remuneration, etc. An integrated database was developed to capture the relevant recruitment data from major online recruitment portals. Around 1 200 recruitment records were collected during the research period and served as indicative information of the job market trend. Mapping was made with the list of related companies under the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification for removal of duplicated records.

Limitations

As this is not a full manpower survey, the findings and recommendations of the focus group meetings are more qualitative in nature and the report mainly focuses on the manpower trend. The information of job advertisements was collected from major recruitment websites and the Labour Department, while other channels such as head hunting for managerial positions or referral and recruitment via LinkedIn were not covered. Since the data collected is a snapshot of a particular period without reference to any historical data, this can only serve as reference information supplementary to the findings of focus group meetings.

Data Analysis

The analysis consists mainly of the following three steps:

To collect qualitative information from focus group.

To collect quantitative information from desk research on numbers of recruitment advertisements for reference.

To analyse both qualitative and quantitative information in consultation with members of PPTB.

Findings

Factors Affecting the Development of the Print Media and Publishing Industries

Several factors affecting the development of the industry were first identified by the PPTB. Questions in relation to the factors were raised and discussion were invited in the focus group to understand how the factors contributed to the recent development or changes in the industry.

Technology and Change in Reading Behaviour

Change in reading behaviour

The print media and publishing industries are facing competition caused by the internet and digital media.

Digital device has become the most common tool people use to access to news, information and knowledge. Its interactive and captivating features involving audio, animated graphics and video has changed the way people learn, read and socialise. While the time that audiences spend on media become more fragmented, their attention span is shortened and less time is spent on in-depth reading. Publishers have to tailor products and the marketing directive to meet audience's altered reading patterns.

Automated production and Industry 4.0

Though smart and automated production is not yet fully adopted in the entire print media industry in Hong Kong, subject to product types, some printers have started to explore the application of Industry 4.0 in the production process. Some printers gradually replace some of the equipment and machines which made production process more automated and less intervened by human, hence improved efficiency and accuracy. Some also begin to analyse data collected from production and workflow and further enhanced Enterprise Resource Planning system. There is no doubt that the investment would be huge in terms of renewing existing production system and upgrading it to a fully automated system. As agreed by most printers, the application of industry 4.0 would inevitably be the major force that influences the future of the print media industry.

International Standards

There is a trend for printers to invest in human resources to comply with international standards such as ISO, G7, PSO, PSA, etc. International standards save more time and money by reducing

proofing cycles and maintains consistent product quality under faster production process.

Economy, Investment and Rise in Material Cost

Impact of global economy

The global economic condition has significant impact on print media and publishing industries.   Concerns about escalating trade tension on China-US business and rise in material and labour cost, especially paper, would be critical factors affecting investment decision. Competition is keen in the print media industry.   For financial printers, global economic downswing would adversely affect the number of companies to be listed and their subsequent printing of prospectus and related information.

Expand Publishing Boundaries

Cultural extension activities

Some publishing companies shift from merely rely on book sale to developing cultural extension activities (such as travel, seminar, training class, etc.) so as to obtain better growth in profits.   The cultural extension activities engage a group of audiences which brings synergy effect to the overall business.

From students to parents

Textbook publishing plays a key role in the industry by employing a significant portion of manpower and contributing a large share of revenue.   While the textbook market is becoming saturated, there is tiny room for further growth.   The publishing industry strives to broadening target readers to parents and learning centres.   Publishers expand business by producing learning materials for young learners in kindergarten and a modified version for parents to use at home.   Those learning materials are often supplemented with some digital products.

Public Policy

Long term policy to encourage reading

Literacy skills are one of the most important skills for one to learn and survive in the knowledge economy.   Many countries have developed persistent public policy to encourage reading habit of the society. For example, the Singapore Government launched the National Reading Movement in 2016.   The 5-year campaign aims to encourage adult and senior citizens to "Read More, Read Widely and Read Together" – set aside some time to read regularly, read go beyond the usual genres and read in mother tongue languages with family and friends.
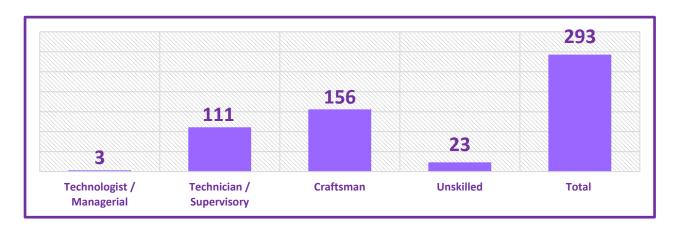
The Hong Kong Government also launched a similar campaign named as "Discover and Share the Joy of Reading" in 2018.

Moreover, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the Education Bureau will disburse a recurrent grant to all public sector primary and secondary schools to promote reading. It is expected that a persistent public policy that includes a long-term planning to promote and nurture students' reading habits from toddlers to adults would enhance reading atmosphere, which might slow down the declining population of readers.
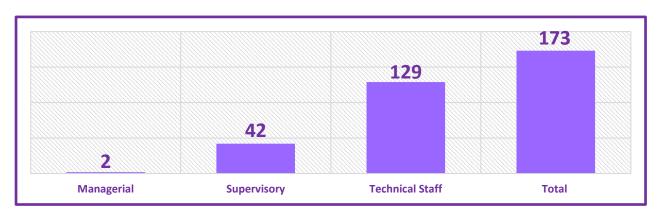
Future Manpower Demand

In the 2016 Manpower Survey of Printing and Publishing Industries, employers forecasted that printing manpower would be reduced slightly in 2017 while manpower of the publishing industry would remain stable.

Number of job vacancy in printing industry in the 2016 manpower survey (by job level)
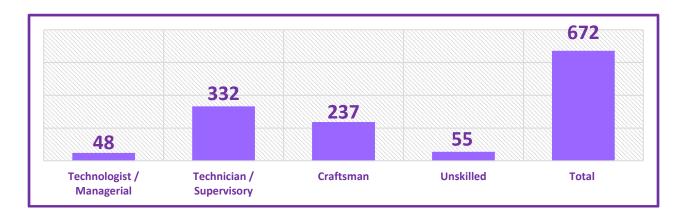

Number of job vacancy in publishing industry in the 2016 manpower survey (by job level)

Despite an overall contraction in manpower was expected in the print media industry, there was still a demand for technician / supervisory staff in the print media and publishing industries.   This can be reflected in the number of job advertisements captured by the desk research between July 2017 and April 2018.   A significant number of them recruited sales representative/supervisor, designer, editor/assistant editor, marketing/publicity supervisor and production planner.   Some of the recruitments are commonly required by the other industries, such as the media, technology, marketing and

communications.   The unmet manpower demand in the industry was also a result of the tight labour market – the unemployment rate declined to its lowest in 20 years, from 3.4% in 2016, 3.1% in 2017 to 2.8% in 2018.

Number of job advertisement in print media industry
for the period between July 2017 and April 2018 (by job level)

Technologist / Managerial	Technician / Supervisory	Craftsman	Unskilled	Total
48	332	237	55	672

Number of job advertisement in publishing industry
for the period between July 2017 and April 2018 (by job level)

Managerial	Supervisory	Technical Staff	Total
79	260	175	514

With reference to the discussed trends and development of the industries, views of the focus group on the anticipated changes in manpower demand of two industries were collected.

Printing

Printed materials are now often supplemented with digital products. Traditional printing workers need to be retrained to acquire the new skills of production. However, it is difficult to have workers to acquire multiple skills as well as being highly resilient and responsive in meeting the job requirements. Retention of workers appeared a problem. The overall manpower demand might slightly decline in the future.

Mixed skillset of traditional and digital printing

As digital printing is becoming more popular in producing printed materials with greater variety and potential in attracting audiences' attention, there is a growing demand for digital printing machine operation staff. Employers who own assets of traditional and digital printing machines would expect production workforce that equipped with a combination of skillsets of operating both types of machines.

Financial printing

Production of financial printing materials such as annual report or prospectus of listed companies requires high accuracy, has

to be produced in short turnaround time and must comply with regulators' standards. Financial printing firms especially require experienced print professionals. Salesperson and customer service staff that are familiar with listed companies' requirements as well as print production process would be crucial as they were the key communicator between printer and client. Similar to printing practitioners working in newspaper printing companies, some practitioners in the financial printing firm, such as proof-readers and print machine operators also have to work night shift in order to cope with the tight timeframe.

Security printing

Security printing service is one of the industry players that would expect a slight increase in manpower. Security printing deals with products such as identity cards, passports and cheques that involve techniques preventing counterfeiting. It is expected there would be further growth from overseas market. However, security printers are facing the challenge of insufficient production manpower, especially in positions of quality controller and printing machine operator.

Consolidation and more automation

There has been consolidation of business in the print media industry in the past few years. The situation is expected to continue in the future which causes manpower to decline. The past consolidation released some experienced

practitioners and they were absorbed by companies that were in short of operational labour. Some of them joined other industries instead.

Shortage for operational staff has been existing in the recent years as it is difficult to recruit new blood. Existing staff would be required to take up more tasks and responsibilities. Some printers adopted more automation and supplementary system in the production process, attempted to minimise human intervention and solve part of the manpower problem.

Publishing

The overall manpower demand is expected to increase slightly in the future.

Widen job scope of editorial staff

Apart from arranging content of the publication, editors nowadays play a more complex role in a publishing company. They have to liaise and maintain good relationship with stakeholders such as authors, media, readers, or parents and teachers. They also engage in communicating with the marketing team to provide directive advice based on the characteristics of target readers. In small size publishing companies, editors also involve in devising marketing plan for newly launched products as well. Moreover, textbook editors also have to be familiar with the requirements of the Education Bureau and to ensure the products complied with the guidelines.

Supportive staff

At present, there is about 25% of staff in the publishing industry belonged to the back-end support team. The team mainly includes customer service, marketing and logistics staff, which are responsible for marketing and promotion of new products, supporting book fair, etc. While digital and social media became a significant channel of marketing and promotion, some of the supportive staff has to work long hours and respond quickly in the online community.

Re-allocation of resources

As the publishing industry has become more digitalised in workflow and develops more digital product, resources are re-allocated. Manpower for non-core activities such as logistics would decline due to outsourcing.

Retain and compete for talents

As the publishing industry has more digital products and adopts digital marketing in greater extent, the industry is increasingly competing for talents with other industries, such as technology start-ups, education institutes or marketing services companies. Some experienced practitioners set up their own independent publishing companies. Retention of staff with 2 – 3 years' experience is especially difficult. Some strong players with great potential in their organisations are lost and it takes time and extra resources to recruit and train up the new replacement.

Training Needs

Based on the afore-mentioned trends and development of the industry as well as the expected manpower changes, the focus group and the PPTB identified further details on the skill sets as required by the industry.

Multi-skilled manpower

As digital printing is becoming more common in the print media industry, practitioners of traditional printing should extend their skill scope to digital printing. A workforce equipped with skills of operating both traditional and digital printing machines would enable greater flexibility in assigning manpower under tight production schedule and labour shortage.

In the publishing industry, the widen job scope of editorial staff requires a workforce not only familiar with the subject matter of the book. Apart from editorial skills as the core skills required, editors should also be good at social networking with various parties – authors, media, printers, target reader group, parents and schools. To ensure the publications are produced at desired quality and timely, editors should have basic understanding of print production and the latest print effect which could add value to the product and make it more appealing to readers. To cope with tight project schedule, the editor should be well aware of how to effectively reach and engage target readers through digital and social marketing.

Communication skills

Sales and customer service personnel connects clients with printers. While the contribution of salespersons and customer service representatives could not be replaced by any automated system, their ability to communicate effectively with clients and production team becomes critical to overall production efficiency. Training on communication skills and basic printing knowledge would be equally important to sales and customer service staff. It is also advised that language courses, especially English and Mandarin could be offered, given communication with overseas clients and Mainland China colleagues is frequent.

Digital Skills

As there are more books associated with digital products which involve multimedia content, the editorial workforce should possess knowledge of content management for digital product to facilitate communication with development team.

Social Media Skills

With the phenomenal growth of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc., it has enabled people from all over the world to share their story and essentially changed the way of communication to become more instant, creative and visual. Publishing staff should be aware of the most suitable social media platform to reach their targeted readers and community, as well as how to effectively engage them in marketing campaign.

Insight and Creativity

Book publishing nowadays is often associated with cultural extension activities whereas the activities are one of the profit sources and connect relevant community with the book/theme. Editors and publishing staff together have to devise a holistic plan that incorporates book, promotion and activities. The process of planning a publishing project is a combination of insight, creativity and project management skills.

For trade book editors, they have to be creative, sensitive to social trends and well understand the need of targeted readers. Some editors may use social media as a tool to discover new author or book ideas that are interested by the mass and locate potential authors.

Recruitment Challenges

The print media industry has difficulty in hiring young people or right talents to join while the publishing industry faces challenges of retaining experienced staff.

Industry image

Despite some graduates consider the print media industry as "sunset industry" due to the impression of printed materials being replaced by electronic platform, many industry players continued to upgrade their existing production system with latest technology.   However, most youngsters are not aware that technologies are changing the manufacturing industries.   They might consider the idea of developing career in the manufacturing industry is not as attractive as that in others such as media or design.   There are fewer youngsters joining the industry in recent years due to the demanding job nature and less competitive remuneration package.

Working hours

6-day work and working on public holidays are one of the factors that deter youngsters from joining the print media industry. Very few fresh graduates are willing to work night shift or return to workplace under harsh weather conditions.   Some of them will quit after working in the industry for only a short period of time due to the undesirable working hours.

Preference of young generation

Young generation has different preferences, expectations, and values in the workplace. They emphasis work-life balance, some prefer freelance or slash career that offers greater flexibility in their work time arrangement.   Their expectation might be difficult to match with the nature of the print media and publishing industries – tight project / production timeline.   It is also difficult to recruit young people who possessed multiple skills and high resilience to handle different tasks concurrently.

Competition for talents

Another factor that causes hiring difficulty is the keen competition for manpower supply among industries.   The publishing industry might be competing for young multimedia designers with game or technology industries.   Retaining talents, especially those who have experience in the industry thus become difficult.   It is not uncommon for publishing practitioners to look for opportunities in media industry or education sector in view of the attractive remuneration offered.   Some even partner with one or two friends to start online business for publishing.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Measures to Meet Recruitment Challenges and Training Needs

To meet the future development of the industry, it is considered essential for the education institutions and industry to formulate effective strategies in recruitment, retention and upskilling talents.

Print media industry – talent recruitment

Training for young people

In response to the demand for technical level staff in the print media and publishing industries as evidenced in the desk research data, an enhanced Earn and Learn Scheme targets at technician level for the print media industry could be developed with the collaborated efforts of institution and industry.   The existing Earn and Learn Scheme for the print media industry targeting students of Diploma of Vocational Education (DVE) should be reviewed to ensure trained manpower is supplied to the industry.

To cater for the increasing demand on digital products associated with printed books or printed materials, students' knowledge on digital printing should be strengthened.   Digital skills on content

management and the complementarity of digital and printed product forms should also be emphasised in printing and publishing related programmes to prepare young people for joining the industry.

Exchange between education institutions and the industry

Knowledge and experience exchange between industry practitioners and students as well as trainers can be strengthened.   Practitioners from the industry can be invited to be guest lecturers or speakers in school lectures in order to train up students with industry's knowledge and practical skills on top of academic learning.

Institution-industry partnership

It is agreed by the industry that curriculum comprised of practical elements such as internship and workplace attachment programme is effective in training up suitable talents and can ease the situation of manpower shortage.   Education institutions may consider developing structured work-integrated learning programmes that involve partnership between institutions and employers, in which both work together to help young

people attain the educational goal through academic study and structured vocational training in the workplace.   The work-integrated learning will better prepare young people for the school-to-work transition and improve the work-readiness of new entrants.

Improve industry image

To boost youngsters and parents' confidence to the future of the print media industries, its latest development should be presented in campaigns, secondary schools and tertiary education institutes, especially in terms of the advanced technology adopted by the industry.   Information such as career plan and structured progression pathways could help young people and their parents have a better understanding of the opportunities in the industry.   Factory and office visit would allow them to know what it is like to work in the industry.

Remuneration and worktime arrangement

Organisations have to stay current with the remuneration packages to compete for talented manpower with other industries.   Salary and benefits are fundamental to attract and retain talents.

If resources are adequate, printing employers may recruit one or two extra staff to allow greater flexibility in staff deployment in 5-day work roster.   Building the company culture like a healthy work/life balance, autonomy to deliver, and defined ownership can also help engaging staff.

Support internship programmes

In the age of talent shortage, employers take part in the internship scheme will gain more benefits.   Internship enables employers a scope to try out different candidates before determining to get the right one.   Intern students can also offer extra manpower support to the regular team.   They are able to learn more about the industry through real work experience and join the team after graduation.

Publishing industry – talent retention and succession planning

Retain young talents

To attract and retain young employees, employers should be aware of their work values and expectations.   The publishing industry may consider offering flexible appointment contracts to meet the career aspirations of prospective candidates.   Freelancers will also ease part of the publishing manpower shortage.

Succession planning and talent grooming

Normally young publishing employees who have worked in the organisation for 2 – 3 years are potential candidates for advancing to supervisory level.   Their turnover usually brings challenges to senior leaders when there is a key role opens up or reassignment of jobs.   Effective succession planning can ease the problem.   It brings

advantage for employees and the growth of organisation. Employees knowing their next potential opportunity will be more willing to take up challenges, offer constructive ideas and equip themselves with new skills.

Managers or supervisor should be able to identify the skills and experience of strong players and offer training opportunities especially in project management, communication and management skills to get them prepared for situations of organisational growth, product expansion or career advancement.

Upskilling workforce of print media and publishing industries

Training for industry practitioners

Owing to the tight work schedule of printing and publishing practitioners, workshop or sharing sessions on the latest concept or technology application such as design thinking, digital and social media skills, can be regularly arranged at practitioners' workplace.

E-learning

For generic skills such as problem solving, communication skills, project management, E-learning platform could be provided for industry practitioners.

Collaborate with industry to conduct trade-related training

To upgrade trade-specific knowledge of industry practitioners, education institutions could collaborate with industry associations to conduct relevant short-term training.

Reindustrialisation and Technology Training Programme

Employers are encouraged to make good use of the Government's funding, such as the Reindustrialisation and Technology Training Programme, which supports staff training in advanced technologies, especially those related to "Industry 4.0".

Support staff learning

Employers generally acknowledge that investment in talent development is part of their outlay to human capital. However, due to many competing interests and tight budgets, many employers may encounter difficulties in investing in employees' professional development. While the long term personal development still rests on individual's responsibility, company commitment for the continuous professional development of employees is essential for organisation growth. Employers are encouraged to support continuous learning amongst their staff, particularly in face of the rapid development in technology.

To save time, training could be delivered in workplace by hiring trainer from external, or in the form of job rotation, e.g. rotation between operating traditional and digital printing machine after offering sufficient training to staff.

Apart from sponsoring employees to attend training programmes, employers may support staff to attend overseas trade fair or book fair so that they could observe the advanced technology or best practice of industry in other countries and cultivate a global perspective of industry development.

For publishing, industry associations may provide CEF-funded programmes on trade-specific skills that are needed by the industry so that practitioners can upskill themselves using the Government subsidy. The associations may invite speakers of other industries to conduct seminar or workshop in relation to industry technology update, recent social phenomenon or current affairs, in order to allow more open and interactive discussion.

Take part in the industry's manpower development

In the long term, employers are also asked to support manpower development of the industry by:

(i) conducting more collaboration projects with training institutions to nurture young blood;

(ii) providing advice to institutions on curriculum development for training more work-ready graduates; and

(iii) supporting the Earn and Learn Scheme and offering advice to enhance the Scheme; and

(iv) participating in the VTC's manpower survey and focus groups where valuable insights are collected from the industry.

Employees' role

An open mind to learn

Employees should have the capability to self-learn through various channels on the Internet and maintain an open mind to collaborate with and learn from others. They should be able to catch up with new technologies, and be aware of how automation affects the industry and the job opportunities.

Make use of Government's subsidy

Employees are encouraged to make use of the subsidies provided by the Government such as the Continuing Education Fund for lifelong learning.