



THE HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF SURVEYORS

5 December 2005

The Hon LI Fung Ying, BBS, JP
Chairman of the Establishment Subcommittee
Legislative Council
c/o Room 606, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Central
Hong Kong

By Fax & Post
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Dear Ms Li

Unprecedented Restructuring of Assistant Director Posts in the Buildings Department

Further to our letter of 22 October 2005 (copy enclosed for your easy reference) to the Chairman of the LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works – Hon LAU Wong Fat, GMB, GBS, JP, we hereby express our grave concern about the subject matter for your kind consideration.

1 Mismatching professional expertise with the functions of the Assistant Director

We understand that the role of the Assistant Director/Existing Buildings commands very high responsibilities in setting policies for the betterment of the existing private buildings and the overall built environment. Other than playing an administrative and managerial role, more importantly the Assistant Director must have a high level of knowledge and experience in the right profession to properly enforce the law on building control for the maintenance of overall public safety, health and hygiene.

In the daily practice of the building industry, different professions play different roles and have different functions in line with their learned professions. The division of responsibilities according to their respective professional background is very clear and mutually respected over the years. Building surveyors are trained as experts in building control, maintenance and project management whilst structural engineers are trained as experts in structural engineering. Normally, in the building projects, structural engineers assume a supporting role to deal with structural matters only. We therefore cannot believe that the roles and expertise of different professions can be shifted and mixed in such a casual way without a long process of recognized education and training in the respective professional regime.

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We very much respect the quality of services that used to be delivered by the Buildings Department. We believe that the proposed restructuring, which give no respect to the expertise and capability of different professions, will unavoidably degrade the quality of service delivery and thus adversely affect the interest of the public at large as it has already created conflicts between staff of the building surveying discipline and the structural engineering discipline in the Department. Equally damaging is that it has caused an unpleasant state of relationship between members of the concerned professional institutions due to the unprofessional and irresponsible approach of the proposed restructuring exercise.

2 Sacrificing public interest with wrong allocation of resources

Normally, we would not interfere with any internal affairs of government departments such as deployment of staff. However, on this occasion, the proposed restructuring is more than an internal affair of the Buildings Department because the Assistant Director assumes the duty to set policies and exercise the law affecting the interest of the public. The restructuring by wrong allocation of professional resources does not only jeopardize the career prospects of building surveying professionals but also hinder the appropriate exercise of professional judgment on the overall safety and hygiene control of the ever-aging buildings in Hong Kong.

We have little confidence that after the proposed restructuring, the long established quality of services delivered by the Department could be maintained, not to mention any improvement. Simply, we cannot accept that the role of building surveying professionals is replaceable by the structural engineering professionals. This action would be irresponsible and result in the wrong allocation of government resources and waste public money.

3 Paying no respect to our surveying profession

As always, we need not say more on our dedication to the building industry as to the creation of a better built environment for Hong Kong. Our professional building surveyors are long committed to serve the public on the maintenance of building safety and better living environment. Our surveyors are professionally trained to serve for such role. The proposed restructuring has dampened the spirits of the building surveyors of our Institute. We voice out loud our grievances this time on the unreasonable treatment by the administration of the Department that has paid no respect to the professionalism by equating a totally different profession with us. The damage which may be caused to the entire surveying profession could be far reaching, particularly when we, the professional surveyors, are expected to assist in resolving the aging building problems in Hong Kong.



4 Lack of consultation with stakeholders

We feel that the decision for the proposed restructuring has been lightly taken with no consideration of its adverse consequences at all. As a professional institute who plays a key role in setting standards and requirements for the professional qualifications of our members, we regret to say that we are mindful of not being consulted in this important proposed restructuring exercise. Doubtless to say that it would undermine both public interest and our members' interest.

In view of the above, we have to say that the Institute is strongly against the proposed restructuring. We believe the Government should approach this issue on a more professional and realistic way instead of viewing the question just for the sake of satisfying its administrative convenience. We sincerely hope that our views would receive your genuine consideration and we are prepared to meet with you to elaborate further if required.

Yours sincerely

T T Cheung
President (2004-2005)

Enc

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