

# Manpower Update Report

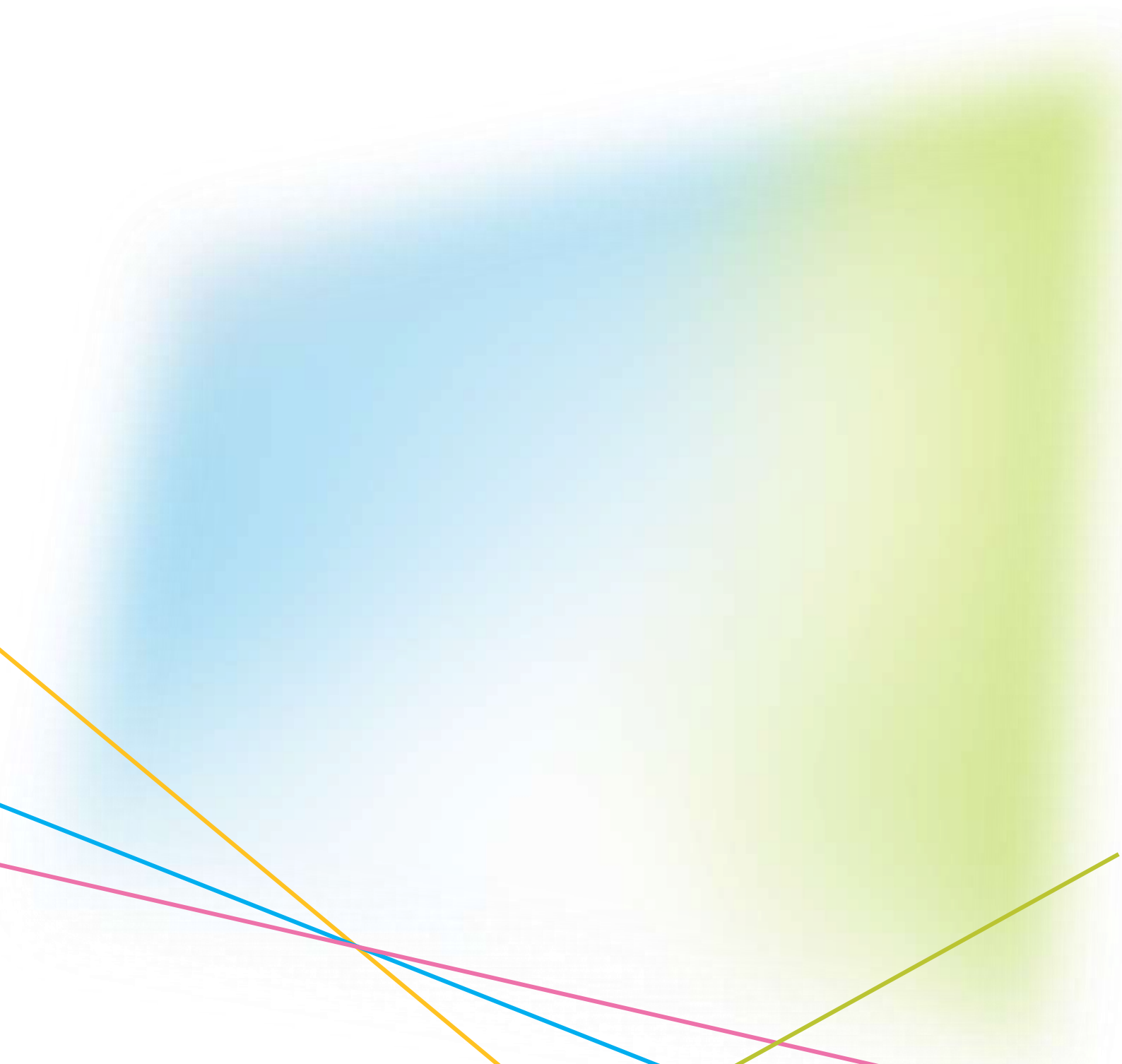
## Catering Industry

# 2025



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism Training Board would like to express its gratitude to the members of the focus group for their valuable time and insights on the manpower situation of the catering industry. Special thanks go to CPJobs and CTgoodjobs which shared the database of job vacancies. The views of focus group and Training Board members and information from major recruitment websites formed an integral part of this report.



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# Introduction

## Background

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism Training Board (HOTB) of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) is appointed by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). According to its Terms of Reference, the HOTB is responsible for determining the manpower situation and training needs of

the hospitality industry which encompasses the catering, hotel and tourism sub-sectors, assessing whether the manpower supply matches manpower demand, and recommending to the VTC the development of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) facilities to meet the assessed training needs.

A new approach for collecting manpower information is adopted to better reflect the dynamics of the manpower situation in the various industries. Under the new approach, one full manpower survey is conducted every four years, and is supplemented by two manpower updates. The HOTB completed its latest manpower survey for catering industry in 2022. Two manpower updates would be conducted in 2024 and 2025.

- (iv) challenges; and to recommend measures to meet the training needs.

The 2024 manpower information update comprises:

(a) a focus group meeting of the catering industry was conducted on 29 April 2025 to collect the views of industry experts on the latest developments in the industry, manpower and training needs, recruitment difficulties, and measures to tackle the challenges the industry faces; and

(b) desk research analysing job advisements, including job market trend and skills required in the catering industry.

## Objectives

The objectives of this manpower update report of the catering industry are:

- (i) to examine the latest trends and developments in the industry;
- (ii) to identify the job market situation and training needs;
- (iii) to identify the recruitment

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# Methodology

## Overview

This update report constructs the qualitative descriptions of the recent developments of the industry through a focus group meeting, supplemented by making reference to some quantitative data of recruitment advertisements from desk research.

Around 24,000 recruitment records were collected during the research period and served as indicative information of the job market trend. The list of related companies under the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification was mapped to remove duplicated records.

## Focus Group Meeting

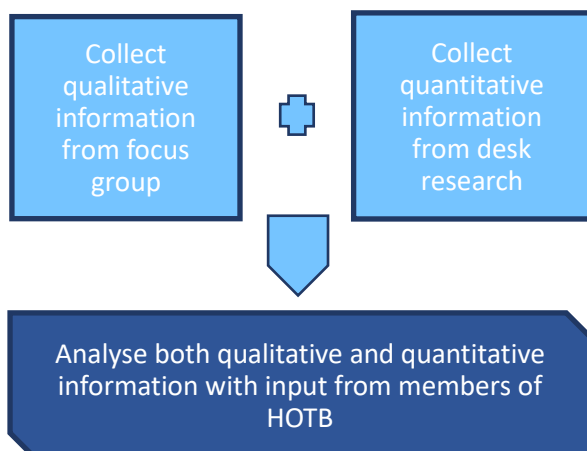
Focus group members from the catering industry discussed on topics supported by the Working Party on Manpower Survey of the Catering Industry. The discussions at the meeting were recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis.

## Desk Research

Manpower information covering the period between May 2024 and April 2025 was collected through desk research. An employment information system was developed to capture the relevant recruitment data from major online recruitment portals.

## Data Analysis

The analysis consists of the following three steps:



After the above qualitative and quantitative analysis, the findings and recommendations were augmented and endorsed by the HOTB.

## Limitations

Different from the extensive quantitative manpower survey performed in 2022, this update report aims to discover the emerging themes in the manpower development of the industry. The employment trends and behaviour, recruitment difficulties, insights and observations from the stakeholders' experience were captured through this focus group and desk research. While the update report has adopted the qualitative approach of focus group discussion which covered a controlled selection of stakeholders, it might not be generalised to the entire population. Desk research that gathered information

of job vacancies from advertisements in major recruitment websites and the Labour Department, also might not be exhaustive without reference to any historical data, those were used as reference supplementary to the observations of the focus group.

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# Findings

## Factors Affecting Development of the Industry

### Economy

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Hong Kong's catering industry is facing significant pressures due to the current economic downturn. With consumer spending declining, demand for catering services has weakened. For instance, many businesses are reducing corporate events and large-scale gatherings, which previously were a key revenue source for caterers. In response, catering firms are pivoting toward smaller private functions and expanded takeout services to sustain operations. Additionally, the economic uncertainty has made consumers more cautious with spending, further squeezing profits in the catering industry.

### Rental

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High rental costs in Hong Kong present another substantial challenge for the catering industry. The city is known for its exorbitant real estate prices, which can consume a large portion of a catering business's budget. For example, venues in prime locations often come with hefty rental fees, forcing caterers to either increase their prices or operate with slim margins. This financial strain can limit the ability to invest in quality ingredients, staff training, and marketing initiatives,

ultimately affecting service quality and customer satisfaction. Many catering companies are thus seeking alternative solutions, such as pop-up events or partnerships with established restaurants to mitigate these costs.

### Labour Cost

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In addition to high rental costs, the labour market in Hong Kong is another major challenge faced by caterers. The catering industry requires skilled labour, and with rising labour costs, businesses find it increasingly difficult to maintain competitive wages while managing their budgets. For instance, the minimum wage increase has led to higher operational expenses for many catering firms. This situation not only impacts profitability but also complicates recruitment efforts, as businesses struggle to attract talent in a market where potential employees may seek more stable or higher-paying opportunities in other sectors.

### Keen Competition

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Keen competition from nearby cities further complicates the landscape of Hong Kong's catering industry. With regions

like Macau and Shenzhen rapidly developing their culinary scenes, Hong Kong faces the risk of losing clientele to these neighbouring markets. For example, the establishment of new dining concepts and innovative catering services in these areas can draw customers away from Hong Kong caterers. Furthermore, the ease of travel and transportation between these locations makes it easier for clients to explore alternatives that may offer more appealing pricing or unique experiences, putting additional pressure on local businesses to differentiate themselves.

Transportation advancements also play a crucial role in shaping the catering industry's future. With improved logistics and transport options, including faster delivery services and more efficient supply chains, catering businesses can source ingredients from a broader range of suppliers. However, this can also mean increased competition, as customers have more choices for catering services, including those from outside Hong Kong. Businesses must leverage these transportation improvements to enhance their own operations and find ways to innovate, such as offering unique menu items sourced from diverse regions while also ensuring they maintain quality and freshness.

## Promotion

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The lack of consolidated promotional initiatives for the catering industry hinders

its growth potential. Unlike other sectors that may receive government support or marketing campaigns to bolster their visibility, the catering industry seems to be operating on its own. This fragmentation can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration and joint marketing efforts that could elevate the industry as a whole. For example, a unified promotional campaign highlighting the diverse culinary offerings in Hong Kong could attract both local and tourist clientele, benefiting all catering businesses. Without such initiatives, individual firms may struggle to stand out in a crowded market, making it imperative for industry stakeholders to advocate for collective marketing efforts.

## Manpower Demand

The demand for manpower in the catering industry in Hong Kong is characterised by a cautious approach due to prevailing economic uncertainties. With the impacts of recent economic downturns and changing consumer behaviour, many catering companies are maintaining adequate staffing levels without over-committing resources. For instance, during quieter periods, businesses might opt for flexible staffing arrangements, such as part-time or temporary workers, to reduce costs while still being able to serve clients effectively. This prudent approach allows businesses to remain flexible, ensuring they can respond quickly to fluctuations in demand, such as during peak seasons like weddings or festivals,

while avoiding the overhead costs associated with excess labour during slower months.

Despite the challenges, it is essential for catering businesses to prepare for a potential upswing in demand. In Hong Kong, where the food scene is vibrant and diverse, businesses can anticipate a rebound as tourism and events gradually return. By investing in training and development now, companies can create a pool of skilled staff ready to step in when business conditions improve. For example, catering firms may partner with local culinary schools to offer internships and training programmes, ensuring that students are not only gaining experience but also aligning their skills with industry needs. This proactive strategy not only enhances operational readiness but also helps retain talent in an industry that often struggles with high turnover rates, particularly among younger workers who may seek more stable employment elsewhere.

## Desk Research

Out of the relevant recruitment advertisements captured in desk research, the top five principal jobs with the highest number of recruitment advertisements were identified:

		Principal Jobs	
		2024	2022
1	Waiter/Waitress; Receptionist; Hostess 13.5%	Waiter/Waitress; Dim Sum Sales; Receptionist; Hostess 21.5%	
2	Baker; Pastry Cook; Cook 11.4%	Kitchen Helper; Cleaner; Dishwasher; Steward; Pantry Server/Helper; Washroom Attendant 13.5%	
3	Kitchen Helper; Cleaner; Dishwasher; Steward; Pantry Server/Helper; Washroom Attendant 6.3%	Baker; Pastry Cook; Cook 9.2%	
4	Captain; Supervisor 6.2%	Captain; Supervisor 7.1%	
5	Beverage Assistant; Bartender; Barman; Mixologist; Barista 4.0%	Junior Cook / No.4 Cook 6.2%	

# Training Needs

- The catering industry requires a diverse set of skills to ensure that services are delivered effectively and meet client expectations. One of the primary training needs is communication skills. Effective communication is essential for coordinating with team members, understanding client requirements, and providing clear instructions in high-pressure situations.
- Interpersonal skills are equally important in the catering industry. Workers must engage with clients, vendors, and colleagues in a manner that fosters positive relationships and encourages collaboration. Training should emphasise the importance of empathy, conflict resolution, and teamwork. By developing strong interpersonal skills, staff can create a welcoming environment for clients and ensure smooth operations within the team.
- Practical skills training is vital for ensuring that staff are competent in their specific roles, whether in food preparation, service, or event management. This includes technical skills related to cooking, food safety, and equipment use. Ongoing training and workshops can help staff stay updated on industry's best practices and improve their overall proficiency. By addressing these training needs, the catering industry can build a skilled workforce capable of delivering high-

quality service and adapting to evolving client demands.

- Creativity is another critical area for training, particularly in menu development and event planning. Caterers need to innovate and adapt to changing trends and client preferences. Training programmes should encourage staff to think outside the box, explore new culinary techniques, and experiment with flavours and presentations. This creative approach not only enhances the dining experience but also sets caterers apart in a competitive market.

## Recruitment Challenges

The catering industry is currently grappling with significant recruitment challenges, exacerbated by economic downturns that directly impact business performance. During periods of reduced demand, caterers often find themselves in a precarious position as the costs associated with food ingredients, labour, and rental space continue to rise. With diminished revenue, many catering businesses struggle to maintain their permanent staff while striving to control operational costs. This situation creates a cycle where businesses are forced to make difficult decisions, including layoffs or reduced hours, which further complicates recruitment efforts.

## High Operation Cost

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High rental costs in Hong Kong pose a particularly daunting challenge for caterers. These expenses can consume a substantial portion of a business's budget, leaving little room for flexibility in staffing. As gross profits decline, catering businesses may find it increasingly difficult to offer competitive wages and benefits that attract and retain talent. This financial strain not only affects existing staff morale but also discourages prospective employees from entering the industry, further exacerbating recruitment difficulties.

## Industry Image

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The industry's image also plays a crucial role in recruitment challenges. Often perceived as lacking professionalism, the catering industry struggles to attract young talent, as many parents do not encourage their children to pursue careers in this field. This stigma can lead to a significant talent gap, with potential candidates opting for industries that are seen as more prestigious or stable. As a result, the catering industry must contend with declining interest from young workers, making it harder to build a skilled and dedicated workforce.

## New Staff Recruitment

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The time required to recruit new staff can be a significant barrier for catering

businesses. The process of finding qualified candidates, especially for specialised roles, can be lengthy and resource-intensive. This challenge is compounded by the high turnover rates among younger workers, who may enter the industry but often leave for more stable or higher-paying opportunities. As a result, caterers face an ongoing struggle to build a reliable workforce, which is essential for maintaining service quality and meeting client demands during peak periods.

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# Recommendations

To meet the future development of the industry, it is considered essential for the government, educators, business trainers, employers and employees to provide suitable manpower training and measures to ease manpower shortages in the following areas:

## Government

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- a. Establish a dedicated department focused on consolidating and promoting initiatives specifically tailored to the catering industry. This department would serve as a central hub for coordinating efforts that enhance the visibility and viability of catering businesses across the region.
- b. Streamline resources and support to ensure caterers have access to the tools they need to thrive in a competitive market. Heighten public awareness of the industry's contribution to the economy and the abundant career opportunities for young executives and entrepreneurs to explore beyond the local market.
- c. Spearheading the promotion of Hong Kong as a "City of Gastronomy." By leveraging the unique culinary heritage and diverse food culture of the region, the government can attract both local and international attention to the catering industry. This could involve organising food festivals,

culinary events, and competitions that celebrate local flavours and innovative catering practices. Such initiatives would not only showcase the talents of local caterers but also encourage tourism, drawing food enthusiasts and visitors eager to experience the rich culinary landscape of Hong Kong.

- d. Provide support for training and education within the catering industry. Collaborating with culinary schools and training institutions can help ensure that aspiring caterers are equipped with the skills necessary to meet industry standards. By fostering a culture of excellence and innovation, the government can help elevate the catering industry, ensuring it remains a vital and dynamic part of Hong Kong's economy.

## Industry

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- a. Actively work to enhance the image of the catering industry. Strategic marketing campaigns can highlight the diverse career opportunities available within catering,

emphasising creativity, teamwork, and dynamic environment that defines the field. By portraying catering as a viable and rewarding career choice, the industry can attract a wider range of talent and improve workforce recruitment.

- b. Emphasise the importance of integrating local culture into catering offerings. By encouraging caterers to incorporate traditional dishes, seasonal ingredients, and local culinary techniques, the industry can create unique dining experiences that resonate with both residents and visitors. This focus on cultural authenticity not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens the unique identity of Hong Kong's food scene, positioning it as a premier destination for gastronomic experiences.

## Educators and Trainers

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- a. Broaden recruitment efforts to admit more students from diverse backgrounds, including local, mainland, and overseas applicants. This diversity is crucial for cultivating a workforce that can cater to a wide range of clients and bring various perspectives to the catering industry. By actively reaching out to underrepresented communities and promoting the benefits of a career in catering, schools can attract a more

varied student body that reflects the multicultural fabric of Hong Kong.

- b. Prioritise training in essential communication and interpersonal skills, which are vital for success in catering roles. Incorporating practical experiences, such as internships and hands-on training, will better prepare students for the realities of the industry. Establishing partnerships between educational institutions and catering businesses can facilitate the development of tailored training programmes that address specific industry needs, ensuring graduates are well-equipped to meet workforce demands.
- c. Further enhance the pipeline of talent entering the catering industry, educational institutions should implement robust apprenticeship programmes. These programmes would provide students with the opportunity to gain valuable on-the-job experience while working alongside seasoned professionals in real-world settings. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, apprenticeship programmes can help students acquire the skills necessary to excel in various roles within the catering industry. This approach not only brings new blood into the industry but also fosters a culture of mentorship and knowledge transfer, ensuring that

the next generation of caterers is well-prepared for the challenges ahead.

- d. Integrate feedback from industry stakeholders into educational curricula to enhance the relevance of training programs. By staying attuned to the evolving needs of the catering industry, educational institutions can ensure that their graduates are not only employable but also capable of driving innovation and excellence within the industry. This collaborative approach will ultimately contribute to a more skilled and diverse workforce, enabling the catering industry to flourish.