

Apprentice laws boost youth training

THE Apprenticeship Ordinance, which came into being last month, will affect some 7,000 establishments and 10-15,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 18.

"This legislation will ensure that apprentices working in the industrial sector will receive both practical training and related technical education," said Mr Horace Knight, Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Industrial Training).

"An employer who takes on an apprentice to work in one of the 23 designated trades must enter into a contract of apprenticeship, which is then registered by the Commissioner," he said.

Some of the trades selected are those of lift electrician, lift mechanic, bookbinder, offset litho plate-maker, knitting machine mechanic, radio/television mechanic and refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanic.

Said Mr Knight: "The designated trades were recommendations from the Hongkong Training Council. Our basic criteria for selecting them were size and importance, the degree of skills or risk involved and the availability of technical education.

"The traditional way of recruiting apprentices was haphazard and unsystematic, but under the new ordinance the contract lays down the rights and responsibilities of both the employer and the apprentice.

"An employer has to provide organised training, allow the apprentice to take a course of instruction at a technical institute and pay the fees for such a course.

"The contract clearly states an employee's pay, and if there is a bonus this too must be put in writing."

A defect of the law is that it specifies no minimum wage.

"If a minimum wage system is imposed at a later date, the Hongkong Training Council may well have to advise the Government on this matter," said Mr Knight.

There has been some con-

troversy over Section 31 of the ordinance, whereby a contract may be terminated for reasons of misconduct or repudiation. A disqualified apprentice will be barred from entering into a new contract for two years.

Mr Knight stressed that:

- The party wishing to terminate a registered contract is required to give the Commissioner for Labour 14 days notice in writing, during which time every effort will be made to save the contract;

- If an apprentice repudiates a contract every effort will be made to get him to change his mind.

"This section is for the good of apprentices so that they do not leave a job before obtaining recognised qualifications.

"It is also designed to help employers and to benefit Hongkong's industry in the long term."

The functions of the Commissioner for Labour are to co-operate with technical institutions to ensure that apprentices obtain the necessary amount of instruction; ensure that adequate training facilities are provided by employers; ensure that the training of apprentices is properly carried out; inquire into the progress and welfare of such apprentices; investigate complaints from employers or apprentices and alleged breaches of contracts; and generally advise employers with regard to training.

How does the Labour Department intend to enforce the law?

"For adequate supervision apprentices ought to be visited every three months, and staff for the newly formed Apprenticeship Division will be built up as quickly as possible," said Mr Knight.

Altogether it has taken seven years to get this law on to the statute book.

The original proposal that

there should be legislation was made by the Industrial Training Advisory Committee (ITAC), the forerunner of the existing Hongkong Training Council which was appointed in October 1973.

"During the past seven years we have tried to per-

suade employers to accept a proposed apprenticeship scheme, which is basically the function of the new law," said Mr Knight.

"At the same time, the Government was making every effort to build four more technical institutes — as recommended by ITAC —

in addition to Morrison Hill.

"Two of these came into operation last September at Kuntong and Kwaichung.

"The third one at Cheungshawan will be ready in September 1977 and the last one in September 1978, either at Sanpokong or Kowloon Tong."