

The English Language Needs of Building Services Practitioners in Hong Kong

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This paper reports the findings of an investigation into the English language needs of practitioners in the building services industry in Hong Kong. The study was carried out in response to the clear need for information about the use of English in the workplace in transitional Hong Kong. The study also had a practical purpose: to provide detailed information on which to base the development of English for professional purposes courses for Building Services Engineering degree students at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire survey of 150 building services practitioners who were studying the part-time degree programme in Building Services Engineering at Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 1996–97. It was found that most of the subjects are required to write and read faxes, letters, memos and reports in English on a regular basis. Generally speaking, the subjects spend more time reading in English than writing in English at work. English does not appear to play a very important role in everyday oral communication in the workplace, and when it is used, tends to be restricted to more formal situations such as seminars, presentations and conferences.