



Fully Engaged in Raising Professionalism

CEA champions efforts to nurture an industry that embraces accountability, integrity and competence through active engagement with the estate agents, industry associations and other stakeholders. CEA is committed to building a community of professionals dedicated to service excellence through continuing training and industry development programmes.

↖ Continuing training helps to raise professionalism of the industry
(Photo: Life Mastery Academy)

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In FY2013, CEA made good progress on several initiatives to uplift the professional stature of the industry. The Continuing Professional Development roadmap was introduced to guide training in a structured and progressive manner. The Real Estate Salesperson examination syllabus was reviewed and course providers assessed to ensure standards and quality were maintained. There was increased engagement and consultation with industry stakeholders on areas of enhancing professional practice, business excellence and productivity of the industry.

HIGH ENTRY STANDARDS

In the year, there were 5,462 individuals who completed the Real Estate Salesperson (RES) course and 56 individuals who completed the Real Estate Agency (REA) Course. The REA course prepares would-be Key Executive Officers (KEOs), practising directors and partners to sit for the REA examination while the RES course prepares aspiring salespersons



Aspiring salespersons taking the RES examination

for the RES examination. These examinations ensure that new entrants to the industry have a competent understanding of industry regulations, policies and procedures.

Both the RES and REA courses are run by the Approved Course Providers (ACPs). CEA monitors the quality of ACPs through participants' feedback and their performance in the examinations. Lesson observations by CEA were conducted at the ACPs from June to December 2013. Trainers were assessed on their knowledge, lesson planning and instructional delivery in teaching the courses. An assessment report was subsequently provided to the ACPs to give them an indication of their trainers' performance.

The RES examination format was changed with effect from the May 2013 examination. A new case study section was introduced in both Paper 1, which focuses on an overview of the real estate agency industry and land law concepts, and Paper 2, which focuses on real estate marketing and property transactions. One or two case scenarios would be given and candidates would have to answer questions which touch on estate agency rules and work relating to the cases. The case study questions test the application of

knowledge to situations that salespersons may encounter. It also gives a practical orientation to the examination papers.

A review of the RES examination syllabus was carried out in the year and revisions to the syllabus were announced in January 2014. The revised RES examination syllabus contains more in-depth details on the relevant topics to enhance practical knowledge of candidates. Rules, regulations, policies, and procedures pertaining to the real estate agency practice have also been updated in the revised syllabus.

In addition, learning outcomes and expectations of cognitive levels for each learning outcome were introduced to facilitate better appreciation of the level of understanding required for each topic. As a result of the review, CEA made adjustments to the topic coverage between the two papers in the RES examination to group associated topics under the same competency units and to achieve a well-balanced coverage for both papers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Continuing professional development (CPD) remains a key component of the regulatory framework to achieve higher professional standards of the real estate agency industry. CEA has been continuously expanding the depth and breadth of CPD courses. To address the diverse learning needs of the industry and encourage a culture of constant learning, CEA worked closely with the industry and training providers to understand the evolving demands in different training areas.

In October 2013, CEA launched the CPD Training Roadmap, a comprehensive framework to guide



CPD course conducted by SAEA Ltd (Photo: SAEA Ltd)

KEOs and salespersons in building their capabilities and professionalism. The CPD roadmap took effect from the annual 2014 CPD cycle which commenced on 1 October 2013. An enhancement to the CPD Scheme implemented in April 2011, the new training framework groups courses into three categories. The categories are based on key knowledge areas needed by salespersons when conducting estate agency work and by KEOs in managing and supervising salespersons under their charge.

Developed in consultation with the industry and training providers, the CPD roadmap aims to provide a systematic framework with clearer direction on core courses that are suitable for KEOs and salespersons of varying years of experience. It encourages a balanced mix of training courses on different subject matters



Salespersons attending a CPD course (Photo: Realty International Associates Pte Ltd)

Positive feedback from salespersons on the CPD courses they attended:

“ *Informative and lively... very useful course which should be attended regularly by salespersons.* ”

- *The Professional Service Manual Made Simple by C & H Properties Pte Ltd*

“ *Useful training program...very enriching experience to learn from a practising lawyer.* ”

- *Common Legal Pitfalls Faced by Real Estate Salespersons by SAEA Ltd*

“ *Learnt a lot in this class... informative and practical training session.* ”

- *Introduction to Commercial Properties by Real Centre Network Pte Ltd*

“ *Good speaker, clear explanation, well prepared, lesson is very informative.* ”

- *HDB Policy Updates by IEA*

and provides guidance to CPD training providers in tailoring courses and materials suitable for different target groups in the industry.



Best Practices Depository



Opening of the Best Practices Seminar by CEA Executive Director, Chionh Chye Khye

The CPD courses in each category are pegged at three levels of expertise to match the needs of salespersons of different experience levels, or those who are at different stages of their careers. Salespersons are free to choose the level of courses appropriate for themselves. They can choose to develop their knowledge in a specific subject progressively by attending courses on the same subject from the lower to the higher levels. Those who wish to pursue more in-depth learning in specialised areas may opt for courses of special interest such as commercial or industrial property, en bloc sale, and dispute resolution.

KEOs and salespersons must complete a mandatory six credit hours of training a year, of which three credit hours must be on core subjects, as a pre-requisite to qualify for licence and registration renewal.

CEA completed its review on the provision of core CPD activities. From 1 April 2014, CEA would be opening up the CPD Scheme to all estate agents for application to be a core CPD activity provider. With this revision, the consideration for allowing an estate agent to conduct a core CPD activity for the industry shifted from the size of the estate agent to assessment of the quality of the course, qualifications of the trainer, and ability of the provider to administer the course satisfactorily.

During the year, CEA approved a total of 121 core CPD training courses covering a wide range of topics from CEA regulations and practice guidelines to policies and procedures related to real estate. These courses were conducted by ACPs, estate agents, industry associations, government agencies, and others such as the Consumers Association of Singapore and The Law Society of Singapore.

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

Best Practices Seminar

Since November 2012, CEA had been visiting estate agents to find out more about the systems, processes and practices that support their businesses and enhance productivity. These visit-cum-dialogue sessions with estate agents culminated in the first Best Practices Seminar held on 11 October 2013. The new platform aims to raise the professional standards of the industry through sharing of best practices and building up a knowledge pool of industry best practices in people management, operational effectiveness and service excellence.

In his welcome address, CEA Executive Director Chionh Chye Khye stressed that it was not enough for the industry to comply with regulations and take errand salespersons to task. CEA and the estate agents must impart to the salespersons the knowledge and skills to deliver value-added services to consumers and perform an excellent professional job. It is also important to uplift all estate agents to achieve excellence in business organisation and practices. He said that this was the way to deliver better service to the consumers and for estate agents to achieve greater competitiveness.

Speakers from five estate agents were invited to share the best practices in their companies. They were Thomas Lee of DTZ Property Network Pte Ltd; Lim Yong Hock of Propnex Realty Pte Ltd; Michael Tan of OrangeTee.Com Pte Ltd; Gui Boon Sim of CBRE Realty Associates Pte Ltd; and Dennis Yeo of Colliers International (Singapore) Pte Ltd. The best practices were categorised into three broad areas of People, Systems and Processes, and Service.



Q&A panel with CEA Deputy Executive Director, Soh Kee Hean (centre) at the Best Practices Seminar

Sharing by Michael Tan, KEO of OrangeTee.Com Pte Ltd on the Integrated IT System

- Facilitates training of salespersons.
- Allows salespersons to view, register and pay for training courses, scan estate agent cards to take attendance, print e-certificates, and monitor training hours completed.
- Reduces cost and human error, and improves productivity for the agency and its salespersons.

Sharing by Dennis Yeo, KEO of Colliers International (Singapore) Pte Ltd on the Net Promoter Score

- Measures the company and its salespersons' service excellence based on consumers' feedback after each transaction.
- All departments and salespersons are able to view online their service performance breakdown by department and by individuals.
- Salespersons with low scores will be counselled.
- Company makes systemic changes to address the low score.

Information from CEA's visits and the seminar was compiled into a depository of best practices on the CEA website and made accessible to all estate agents and salespersons.

IT adoption

CEA has always recognised and encouraged wider adoption of infocomm technology as an enabler to enhance business operations and productivity of the industry. One of the key developments in the year has been the introduction of the Software as a Service (SaaS) for estate agents in partnership with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA).

Under IDA's SaaS Call for Collaboration (CFC) exercise, three vendors were selected for the development of Real Estate Agency Management SaaS applications. Adopters of solutions that meet the CFC requirements would be funded under IDA's iSPRINT (Increase SME Productivity with Infocomm Adoption & Transformation) Scheme. The SaaS system consists of integrated "back-end" Agency Operations and "front-end" Salespersons Operations modules, and is scalable to suit the different needs of individual estate agents and salespersons. Estate agents and salespersons from more than 200 estate agents have signed up and are starting to use the SaaS applications. These estate agents benefitted from the iSPRINT funding.



KEO dialogue session chaired by CEA Executive Director, Chionh Chye Khye

The SaaS implementation was featured in a television programme, "Project-I", in December 2013 which showcased the adoption of IT by small and medium enterprises in Singapore. Several industry representatives were interviewed in the programme and they shared the benefits of SaaS to estate agents and salespersons.

On 14 February 2014, CEA with the support of IDA organised an infocomm technology networking event for industry practitioners to learn new ideas for implementing IT in their businesses. The IT solution providers present shared about the benefits of geospatial technology, the possibilities of using mobile apps and integrated enterprise systems, and applying 3D modelling to aid in estate agency work. Ideas using games technology and data analytics for decision making were also presented.

WIDER INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

In recognition of the need for continual engagement, CEA organises dialogue sessions, briefings, working groups and meetings to disseminate information and listen to the industry.



Salesperson focus group discussion

In FY2013, CEA continued its practice to hold regular dialogue sessions with KEOs of large and medium-sized estate agents to garner feedback and share best practices, disciplinary cases and complaints statistics. These sessions chaired by CEA Executive Director, Chionh Chye Khye engaged KEOs in discussions on various initiatives, policies and guidelines being developed for the industry. Topics included the CPD roadmap, regulations review, professional service manual, certification scheme, marketing of foreign properties and co-broking arrangements. KEOs gave feedback and posed queries to CEA on various matters.

To extend the engagement beyond KEOs, CEA started a series of focus group discussions with salespersons for the first time. These interactive sessions enable CEA to receive direct feedback from salespersons on the issues faced while performing estate agency work. Two focus group discussions were conducted on 26 February and 12 March 2014, one with salespersons from the larger estate agents and another with those servicing the private property and HDB property sectors. Participants discussed and provided useful suggestions on CEA's initiatives ranging from ideas on commendations for salespersons, entry requirements of salespersons to the CPD Scheme.



Sharing by IT solution provider at the Infocomm Technology Networking Event



CEA Deputy Executive Director, Soh Kee Hean speaking at the inaugural SAEA KEO Breakfast Forum (Photo: SAEA Ltd)

The industry associations – Institute of Estate Agents (IEA), SAEA Ltd and Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers (SISV) – are already regular participants in the KEO dialogue sessions held regularly at CEA. In order to provide an avenue for greater exchange, CEA initiated a first dedicated dialogue session with the three industry associations on 27 March 2014. The quarterly dialogue sessions, chaired by CEA Executive Director, Chionh Chye Khye provide an additional channel for CEA to engage and receive feedback from the associations as industry stakeholders representing estate agents and salespersons on issues facing the industry. The three associations will continue to participate in the KEO dialogue sessions where they can hear from KEOs and contribute to the discussions.

CEA also held separate bimonthly meetings with partner agencies in the real estate industry – the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Housing & Development Board, where policy and operational matters of mutual interest were discussed.

CEA participated in the Asia Pacific Real Estate Congress held on 4 and 5 September 2013. The event was organised by the Singapore chapter of the Fédération Internationale des Administrateurs de Biens Conseils et Agents Immobiliers (FIABCI), in partnership with SAEA Ltd and SISV. At the plenary session, CEA Deputy Executive Director, Soh Kee Hean spoke on the regulatory framework for estate agency practice in Singapore. He also identified three areas of focus that CEA would undertake to develop the industry – ethics and professional practices, basic entry training and CPD, and business and organisation practices beyond regulation. The congress was well-attended by both



CEA Director (Regulatory Control), Chan Mun Kit participating in an SAEA KEO Tea Forum (Photo: SAEA Ltd)

local and overseas industry representatives, with more than 70 overseas delegates.

CEA was also invited by SAEA Ltd to speak at two industry events. At the inaugural KEO Breakfast Forum on 21 May 2013, CEA Deputy Executive Director, Soh Kee Hean spoke on "KEOs – Working with CEA to Enhance Professional Practice" and highlighted the importance of KEOs' roles and responsibilities in promoting professionalism in the industry. CEA Director (Regulatory Control), Chan Mun Kit participated in the KEO Tea Forum on 21 August 2013 with a presentation on the Professional Service Manual.

In the year ahead, CEA will continue its drive to raise professionalism in the real estate agency industry. It will consult the industry on improving the quality and variety of CPD courses and increasing the mandatory CPD credit hours. The REA examination syllabus will be reviewed to introduce learning outcomes and ensure continued relevance in the dynamic industry.

CEA will continue to work with stakeholders to introduce new infocomm technology applications to the industry such as the use of e-learning. Industry engagement will be stepped up with more focus group discussions with salespersons and greater consultations with KEOs through regular dialogue sessions to gather their inputs on new initiatives and policies.