

**Legislative Council Manpower Panel meeting
on 27 June 2002**

**Restructuring of training and retraining services:
presentation by Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei,
representative of Concern Alliance
on Training and Retraining**

I speak on behalf of the recently formed Concern Alliance on Training and Retraining. I understand that Members have already been given copies of our submission dated 3 May 2002 to the Manpower Panel. I will therefore try to be brief in my following presentation.

The Concern Alliance at present comprises ten organizations which directly provide training services under the Employees Retraining Scheme operated by the Employees Retraining Board. A full list of the ten bodies is given at the end of our submission to the Panel. The submission also contains the terms of reference of the Concern Alliance, as well as our views on the restructuring of training and retraining services and a number major related issues. In our submission, we have expressed our views on the role of the future Manpower Development Committee, the target group of the Employee Retraining Scheme, status of training centres at present operated by the Vocational Training Council as a result of the restructuring, bidding system, opening of retraining services to the market, role of training bodies in the Preparatory Committee, possible de-linking of placement service, the retraining allowance, and the prospects of staff working in present training bodies.

I would like to highlight a few points:

- In general, we agree to the major thrusts of the reform measures put forward by the Education and Manpower Bureau. However, to make sure that the results intended can be achieved successfully, we think that the process of implementation is most important. As such, we urge that present training and retraining bodies which have been directly providing retraining services should be closely involved/consulted in the process. Of course, we do strongly hope that our recently formed Concern Alliance on Training and Retraining can have formal representation on the Preparatory Committee led by the Education and Manpower Bureau, or can have more direct dialogues with the Preparatory Committee.

- The role of the future Manpower Development Committee may not have to be purely advisory. This could encourage members of the Committee to be even more participatory. The new 'secretariat' taking over the functions of the present Employees Retraining Board should also have to be accountable to the Manpower Development Committee in addition to the Education and Manpower Bureau. In any case, the deliberations of the Manpower Development Committee should be as transparent as possible, including having more direct dialogues with the training bodies.
- Regarding the proposed introduction of a bidding system for assigning retraining services under the restructured system, we wish to stress that the 'prices' quoted by respective bodies should not be the most crucial consideration taken into account by the awarding authority. Other equally important considerations include the history, mission, track record and experience of the bidding bodies. Indeed, we are concerned that the quality of service would be compromised if services would usually be awarded to the 'lowest price' bids. Mechanisms should therefore also be built into the bidding and monitoring processes to ensure service quality across the board.
- The next point I wish to highlight to Members is the retention of placement service presently provided by some training bodies (with partial funding from the Employees Retraining Board). This is a point we feel rather strongly about. We consider that placement service should if possible always be a component of any retraining programme as getting re-trainees placed into jobs should be a major and fundamental function of such programmes. This also is essentially a different service from that provided by the Labour Department because it is targeted and designed specifically for the re-trainees and is therefore very important and useful for them. This arrangement should also enable a much higher success rate of placement in the area the re-trainees were trained for, and as a result, they could successfully pursue their own new careers which should be an important ultimate aim of retraining. The Government, through the training bodies which provide this service, is also able to keep abreast even better with the job market. This in turn ensures that retraining courses provided have a direct relationship with what the market needs.
- On the question of retraining allowance, our view is that it should be retained. Again, we think that the retraining allowance is a vital component of the retraining programme. Obviously, one of the main purposes of the allowance is to encourage more of those unemployed to attend retraining. As for criticisms made by some that certain people attend retraining

courses really for pocketing the allowance, the Government has already put in place effective mechanisms to guard against possible abuses.

- Finally, our Concern Alliance would like me to make one more point to the Panel which was not covered in our submission, and this is in relation to the 'sustainability' and 'transferrability' of the skills taught to re-trainees. Deeper and wider skills should be included in the retraining programmes so that the knowledge acquired by re-trainees can be transferred when they have to change the working field. In any case, this should result in graduated re-trainees having higher sustainability in their new jobs.

I think I should stop here. I do hope that our views can have the endorsement of Members. Thank you.

Concern Alliance on Training and Retraining
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