

For Discussion on 5 October 2006

**Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty
Report on Women in Poverty**

Education, Training and Retraining

PURPOSE

This paper outlines the key initiatives launched under the purview of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to provide education, training and retraining to the labour force in Hong Kong so as to enhance their competitiveness.

BACKGROUND

2. In its Report on Women in Poverty released in June 2006, the Subcommittee made a series of recommendations to alleviate problems faced by women in poverty and to prevent women from falling into poverty. Three of the Subcommittee's recommendations touched upon the enhancement of women's competitiveness in the labour market through education, training and retraining. They are –

Item	Details
(c)	Provide 12-year universal education and allocate more resources for adult education including the provision of evening secondary school courses
(d)	Provide more targeted employment training for women of different age groups and different education background to enhance their employability
(m)	Consider providing insurance cover for about 10 000 local domestic helpers currently registered with the Employees Retraining Board (ERB)

3. We share the Subcommittee's view that it is important for our workforce to attain higher level of education and upgrade their skills so as to enhance their competitiveness. In recent years, the Government has actively promoted the concept of lifelong learning in the community and launched or supported a wide range of education and training schemes/programmes aiming at providing multiple progression pathways for adult learners and enhancing the employability and competitiveness of our workforce. All these programmes offer equal access and opportunities to all eligible applicants irrespective of their gender, while some are tailor-made for women participants. The ensuing paragraphs set out the key initiatives launched under the purview of EMB that are relevant to the three recommendations mentioned in paragraph 2 above.

Universal, Adult and Continuing Education (*Recommendation (c)*)

4. At present, the Government provides equal access to nine-year free and universal primary and junior secondary education as well as subsidised senior secondary education and training for all school-age children. When the new senior secondary academic structure is implemented with effect from the 2009/10 school year, all students will be able to receive six years of primary and six years of secondary education.

5. The Government has been providing incentives for adult learners who wish to pursue continuing education and substantial resources have been allocated to various adult education initiatives. The Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) was introduced in 1980 to subsidise non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise short and informal adult education programmes under particular purviews such as courses for improving basic literacy in Chinese and general education courses. In the 2005/06 school year, there are 105 NGOs receiving subvention under the Scheme for organising 862 informal adult education programmes providing at least 19 500 places. There are also a number of programmes specially designed for women under AESS including Basic Putonghua Course for Women, Stress Management Course for Women, Basic Computer Course for Women and Adjustment Course for New Arrival Women. In 2004/05, about 80% of the 22 600 participants in AESS programmes were female, and about 3 100 of them joined

programmes specifically organised for women.

6. A \$36 million Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses was set up in the 2005/06 school year to provide financial assistance to adult learners attending evening senior secondary courses conducted in designated centres. The number of enrolled students in 2005/06 is about 1 200, of which about half are female.

7. In addition, the Government launched a \$5 billion Continuing Education Fund (CEF) in 2002 to provide financial incentives to those eligible applicants aged from 18 to 60 to pursue continuing education so as to better prepare Hong Kong's workforce for the knowledge-based economy. At present, more than 4 900 approved courses in five economic sectors with high-growth potential (i.e. logistics, financial services, business services, tourism and creative industries) and three types of generic skills (i.e. language, design and interpersonal/intrapersonal skills for the workplace) are covered by the CEF. Over 60% of the over 285 000 applications approved as at end of August 2006 were submitted by women.

8. The Government is committed to promoting and supporting lifelong learning and will continue with our efforts to provide multiple progression pathways for adult learners through our various programmes/schemes. We will review the relevant schemes regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to the changing needs of the economy.

Vocational Training and Retraining (*Recommendation (d)*)

9. The Government has been providing targeted vocational training and retraining for citizens in different age groups and educational background to enhance their competitiveness and employability. The \$400 million Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS) was launched in 2001 to help low skill and low education workers to adapt to the changing economic environment. The Scheme currently covers 23 industries and has so far offered over 8 100 classes and over 164 000 training places for in-service workers. Admission to SUS courses is regardless of age, gender and race. There are generally more female trainees enrolling in

courses dedicated to beauty care, elderly care, import/export, clothing and textile, real estate agent and tourism. About half of all SUS participants are women.

10. The Employees Retraining Scheme provides retraining courses and services to eligible employees to help them acquire new or enhanced skills in order to adjust to economic restructuring and re-enter the labour market. The Scheme is targeted at displaced workers who are aged 30 and above with no more than junior secondary education. Since its inception in 1992, the ERB has provided retraining for over 940 000 retrainees, of whom some 80% are women.

11. The ERB offers both full-time placement-tied skills courses in a wide range of industries to train up the unemployed back to work as well as part-time general skills courses to enhance their employability. Each year, over 100 000 retraining places (about half are full-time placement-tied courses) are provided by the ERB. Apart from skills training, the ERB also provides placement follow-up services to help the graduates of full-time or placement-tied courses to find jobs, with an average placement rate of some 80% over the past few years.

12. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) has been offering a very comprehensive range of vocational education, industrial training and skills upgrading to school leavers and adult learners to prepare them for employment or to enhance their employability. Admission to VTC courses is solely based on the level of education, aptitude and interest of the applicants, regardless of their age, gender and race. The following sets out the main types of vocational education and training programmes offered by VTC for people in employment:

- (a) part-time higher diploma, diploma, higher certificate and certificate programmes are offered to in-service workers who wish to attain higher academic/vocational qualifications. Programmes are offered in nine disciplines ranging from engineering, applied science, design, to hotel and tourism. Of the 23 700 places offered in the 2005/06 academic year, about 26% are taken up by female. For some disciplines such as business administration, child education and community

services, applied science, design and hospitality, over 60% of the enrolled students are female;

- (b) training and skills upgrading courses of different duration are offered by VTC to in-service workers to upgrade their skills and knowledge of their respective trades. Of the 42 500 trainee places offered in 2005/06, about 25% are taken up by female; and
- (c) a wide range of continuous professional development programmes are offered by VTC, mainly in the areas of financial services, management and information technology. Female trainees take up over 50% of the about 31,000 places offered each year.

Insurance Cover for Local Domestic Helpers (*Recommendation (m)*)

13. Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are required to take out insurance policies for their employees and failure to do so constitutes an offence. The ERB can at best play a facilitating role in helping employers to take out insurance for their employees, including Local Domestic Helpers (LDHs). Indeed, the ERB has already done so by identifying several insurance companies which offer a wide range of bargain insurance packages for employers' selection to facilitate their taking out of insurance for the LDH trainees under the Integrated Scheme for Local Domestic Helpers. We consider it inappropriate for the Government or the ERB to use public money to take out insurance coverage on behalf of the employers.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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