

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Specific Measures to Assist Persons with Disabilities and Disadvantaged Groups in IT Adoption

Introduction

This paper updates Members on the measures undertaken by the Government to assist persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups on the wider adoption of IT.

Background

2. The Government is firmly committed to transforming Hong Kong into a digitally inclusive society. We have the conviction that all sectors of the community, including people with disabilities and the disadvantaged groups, are entitled to benefit from the advancement of science and technology, and in particular information and communications technology (ICT), which increasingly plays a key role in enhancing the quality of life.

3. The Government programme for bridging the digital divide is three-fold:

- (a) Improving accessibility of IT facilities, particularly by people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups;
- (b) Raising IT awareness and knowledge; and
- (c) Enhancing the accessibility and usability of Government web sites.

Improving accessibility of IT facilities

4. The Government continues to provide free public access of some 5,300 personal computers (PCs) with Internet connection at around 1,380 convenient locations across the territory.

5. To cater for the distinctive needs of special groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities, assistive devices such as screen reader software, screen-enlarging software (螢幕放大軟件), voice synthesizer software (話音合成軟件), braille display (點字顯示器) and large-size LCD monitors have been installed in PCs at selected Community Cyber Points.

6. To enable people with physical disabilities to access the public PCs, the Community Cyber Points have been equipped with movable stools and special equipment to facilitate adjustment of arm and seating positions.

7. To facilitate students from economically disadvantaged families to use IT, the Government provides, through the Quality Education Fund (優質教育基金), notebook computers for loan to these students.

8. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in collaboration with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) organize the “Computer Recycling Scheme” in the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years to recycle old computers for supply to some 20,000 families with students of Primary One to Secondary Seven. The scheme also provides associated services such as IT training, broadband Internet connection and hotline services, so that more needy students could have computers at home to aid learning and gradually, they can acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for lifelong learning.

9. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) established a Central Fund in 1997 to assist people with disabilities to set up PC workstations at home to help them gain a competitive edge in finding and sustaining an income-generating job. As at March 2006, 238 out of 272 applications were approved with a total grant of \$3.3 million.

10. In October 2005, SWD launched the IT Support Scheme for People with Severe Physical Disabilities as one of the new initiatives under the 2005 Policy Address. It promotes reintegration and adjustment for people with severe physical disabilities upon their discharge from hospital to the community through the use of PCs and IT devices.

11. To help people with visual impairment (VI) to have access to IT for social inclusion, the SWD, with donation of over \$7 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charitable Trust, launched the Jockey Club

IT Scheme for People with Visual Impairment. The objectives of the Scheme are to support non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations providing schooling or social services to people with VI and tertiary institutions to acquire advanced Chinese screen readers and braille displays to facilitate people with VI to surf the Internet; and to subsidize VI individuals in need to purchase these devices for the purpose of study or employment.

12. The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) facilitated the HKCSS in establishing a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) with the aim to support digital inclusion programmes and to engage different stakeholders in designing and implementing digital inclusion strategies for Hong Kong. The DSF committee consists of representatives from the Government, NGOs and the private sector. In 2004-05, the Government injected \$1 million into the Fund and the DSF received \$0.75 million from commercial sponsors. In 2005, six projects out of 58 applications were selected at a total of about \$1 million to support various activities to bridge the digital divide. In 2005-06, the OGCIO injected another \$1 million into the Fund.

Raising IT awareness & knowledge

13. The “IT Hong Kong” campaign has been launched since September 2000 to promote the wider adoption of IT in the community. The Government aims to promote the awareness and wider use of IT in the community, as well as to educate the public in appropriate IT ethics. Free IT awareness and training courses are organized for all sectors of the community, including the elderly, housewives, new immigrants and people with disabilities.

14. These courses provide basic IT training focusing on PC usage and the Internet. At the end of 2005, this campaign has attracted around 102,000 people to participate in the IT awareness courses, including more than 16,000 elders and 19,000 people with disabilities.

15. The Information Technology Training and Development Centre of Vocational Training Council provides vocational training for new entrants and upgrading training for IT professionals. The Employees Retraining Board of EMB provides IT retraining to eligible workers.

16. In addition, the Government broadcasts short radio episodes and organizes free talks, promotional activities and infotainment

programmes to promote the wider use of IT in different sectors of the community.

Enhancing accessibility and usability of Government web sites

17. To ensure that online public services are accessible to all, the Government adopts internationally recognized web accessibility guidelines in all its web site designs. To further enhance usability and accessibility, all Government web sites maintain a consistent appearance by following a set of internal common look and feel guidelines.

18. The majority of government web sites provide Simplified Chinese version for users (e.g. new immigrants and our Mainland counterparts) who are more accustomed to using Simplified Chinese characters than the Traditional Chinese characters.

19. The Government also supports and collaborates with NGOs and professional bodies to conduct seminars and workshops to encourage the adoption of barrier free web design in the private sector.

Way Forward

20. We will continue with our programme of activities and will explore further measures to help promoting digital inclusiveness.

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