

Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

List of outstanding items for discussion
(position as at 21 May 2008)

**Proposed
timing for
discussion**

1. Applicability of HKSAR laws to offices set up by the Central People's Government in the HKSAR

The item was discussed at a number of meetings of the Panel since 1998. When the item was last discussed by the Panel on 28 April 2008, the Administration advised the Panel on the following - 2008/2009

- (a) 15 Ordinances which expressly bind the Government but are silent on their applicability to the Central People's Government (CPG) offices - amendments would be introduced to four Ordinances in the 2008-2009 legislative session. The Administration would discuss further with the CPG on the remaining 11 Ordinances;
- (b) Personal Data Privacy Ordinance (PDPO) - the Administration and the CPG was studying whether and if so how the PDPO should apply to CPG offices set up in Hong Kong; and
- (c) 35 Ordinances which contain express references to the "Crown" - three Ordinances had already been adapted. Three Ordinances had been repealed. The Administration would continue to examine how the remaining 29 Ordinances should be adapted.

The Panel were dissatisfied with the little work progress achieved by the Administration after a lapse of 10 years. Members were particularly concerned about the applicability of the PDPO to offices of the CPG stationed in Hong Kong. Members were also concerned whether sections 66 of Cap. 1 was inconsistent with Article 22 of the Basic Law.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman wrote a letter to the Secretary for Justice (SJ) on 5 May 2008 conveying members' discontent and concerns. The Panel would consider the next course of action after receiving SJ's reply.

2. Provision of legal aid services

The Panel received views from organizations on the approach of the next five-yearly review of the criteria for assessing financial eligibility of legal aid applicants in March 2007. The Panel requested the Administration to consider the views and suggestions of the organizations, and the following views of members when formulating more specific proposals in the latter half of 2007 - May 2008

- (a) the scope of the Supplementary Legal Aid Scheme (SLAS) should be expanded;
- (b) the appropriateness of having a one-line financial eligibility limits, i.e. one limit for all types of cases under the Ordinary Legal Aid Scheme and the criminal legal aid cases, and another limit for SLAS; and
- (c) the present scope of legal aid should be extended from litigation to legal advice.

3. Criminal legal aid fees system

The request for a comprehensive review of the current remuneration system for lawyer engaging in criminal legal aid work was made by the two legal professional bodies in 2003. Such a review was supported by the Panel, the Legal Aid Services Council (LASC) and the Chief Justice (CJ). To be confirmed
by D of Adm

The Administration agreed to review the criminal legal aid fees system and discussed the relevant issues with the Panel at the meetings in December 2005, May 2006, February and June 2007. The Panel noted that the Administration had reached broad consensus with the legal professional bodies on the proposed structure of the criminal legal aid system, and had proposed rates for the various items for various court levels for their consideration. While the Bar Association was content with the proposal, the Law Society considered that the fee rates for the new system unreasonable. The Panel urged the Administration to continue discussion with the legal professional bodies in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution, and report to the Panel in due course.

The Administration reported progress of discussions with the two legal professional bodies to the Panel in February 2008. The Administration was requested to consider the Law Society's proposal that the hourly rate in criminal legal aid should be at a par with civil taxation rates on a party-to-party basis.

4. Professional Indemnity Scheme of the Law Society

In response to the request of the Subcommittee on Solicitors (Professional Indemnity) (Amendment) Rules 2001, the Law Society agreed to conduct an independent review of the insurance arrangement under its Professional Indemnity Scheme (PIS). The purpose of the review was to consider whether at the end of the five-year reinsurance contract (expiring on 30 September 2005) the Law Society should maintain the existing mutual scheme with or without amendment, or to demutualise the scheme and put into effect such other options as might be proposed as a result of the review. In its report to the House Committee on 26 October 2001, the Subcommittee recommended that this Panel should follow up the progress of the review.

To be decided
by the Panel

Since then, the Panel has monitored the review of the PIS and received progress reports from the Law Society.

In November 2004, members of the Law Society voted for a Qualifying Insurers Scheme (QIS) to replace the existing scheme. The Law Society proceeded with the drafting of the relevant rules to implement the new scheme. In June 2005, the Panel was advised that a more realistic date for implementing a QIS would be 1 October 2006.

In May 2006, the Law Society informed the Panel that its members had voted by a large majority not to replace the existing PIS by a QIS at its Extraordinary General Meeting on 27 April 2006. The Law Society had set up a Professional Indemnity Scheme Review Working Party to identify any deficiencies in the existing scheme, consider how they might be remedied, and make appropriate recommendations.

At the Panel meeting in February 2007, the Law Society gave a report on the progress of work of the Review Working Party. The Working Party would proceed to consider a number of outstanding issues and submit a report with recommendations to the Council in due course. The Panel noted that the reinsurance contract was renewed w.e.f. 1 October 2006 for a period of three years, with an option to terminate after two years.

The Law Society's second report on the progress of work of the Review Working Party was issued to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1722/07-08(01) on 25 April 2008. .

5. Demand for and supply of legal and related services

On 7 November 2001, a motion was passed by the Council urging, inter alia, the Government to conduct a comprehensive review on the demand

May 2008

for and supply of legal and related services.

A Consultative Committee chaired by the Solicitor General was established to oversee the Consultancy Study on the Demand for and Supply of Legal and Related Services in Hong Kong (the Consultancy Study) which started on 29 July 2004 and was expected to be completed within two years. It was hoped that the study would assist the Government and other stakeholders to make informed future policy decisions on the provision of legal and related services.

On 12 December 2006, the Panel was advised that the Consultancy Study was progressing well and a report was expected to be published in early 2007. The Administration advised in early March 2008 that it would report to the Panel in May 2008.

6. Limited liability for professional practices

At its meeting on 31 March 2005, the Panel considered the Research Report on "Limited Liability Partnership and Liability Capping Legislation for the Practice of Law in Selected Places" (RP04/04-05) and a submission made by the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA) on professional liability reform in Hong Kong.

To be confirmed
by DoJ

The Panel continued discussion on the relevant issues at its meeting on 23 May 2005, with particular reference to the report prepared by the Law Society's Working Party on Limited Liability Partnership. DoJ advised the Panel that it would prepare a paper on the subject matter for the consideration of the Policy Committee in about six months' time.

The Consumer Council, which was represented at the Panel meeting on 31 March 2005, submitted its preliminary views on the issue of limited liability partnership to the Panel in a letter dated 24 June 2005 (circulated vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2210/04-05(01)).

At the meeting on 27 March 2006, the Administration informed members that it had decided that no further studies would be carried out into proposals on limitation of liability to pay compensation during the remainder of the Chief Executive (CE)'s term of office. Members, the Law Society and the HKICPA were disappointed at the Administration's decision and agreed to relay members' views to the Financial Secretary for consideration (LC Paper No. CB(2)1645/05-06(01)). On 16 May 2006, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury replied on behalf of the Financial Secretary, reiterating that the Administration had already taken account of all the arguments put forth by the relevant professional organizations as well as views expressed by the Panel in arriving at the decision that no further studies would be carried out into the proposals for limiting liability during the remainder of CE's term of office (LC paper No. CB(2)2061/05-06(01)).

The Panel received a letter from Hon Mandy TAM Heung-man in September 2007 requesting it to further pursue the matter with the Administration in the current session. The Administration was requested to advise on the approximate timing for reverting to the Panel on the item. The Administration responded on 22 February 2008 that given that there remained less than five months in the current legislative session, it appeared unrealistic to revert to the Panel during this legislative session. The Chairman wrote to the Administration on 29 February 2008 requesting it to advise on the present state of affair.

7. Solicitors' right of audience

The item was proposed by the Law Society.

2008-2009

In June 2004, CJ appointed the Working Party on Solicitors' Rights of Audience to consider whether solicitors' existing rights of audience should be extended and if so, the mechanism for dealing with the grant of extended rights of audience to solicitors.

On 9 June 2006, the Working Party issued a Consultation Paper on Solicitors' Rights of Audience to solicit public views on whether solicitors should be granted extended rights of audience in the higher courts of Hong Kong (issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2312/05-06(01)). The consultation period originally ran until 31 August 2006 but was extended until the end of September 2006 at the request of relevant parties.

The Secretary of the Working Party briefed members on the Final Report on 13 December 2007. Both the Bar Association and the Law Society expressed support for the recommendations of the Final Report. After the meeting, DoJ advised the Panel that it would try its best to obtain a legislative slot to introduce the proposed legislation at the next LegCo session, and the code of conduct was expected to be available for discussion by the Panel before the introduction of the Bill.

8. Recovery agents

An Executive Summary and a report from the Special Committee on Recovery Agents of the Bar Association was circulated to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1516/04-05(01) on 10 May 2005 (Appendix I to the report was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1646/04-05 on 23 May 2005). A circular on "Recovery Agents" (RAs) issued by the Law Society to its members was circulated to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1609/04-05(01) on 19 May 2005.

To be decided by the Panel

The Panel discussed this item at its meetings on 28 November 2005, 22 January, 23 April 2007 and 19 March 2008. At the last meeting, the

Administration was requested to update the Panel on the timeframe for launching the APIs and other developments before the Panel meeting on 26 May 2008 when the item "Five-yearly review of the criteria for assessing the financial eligibility of legal aid applicants " would be discussed.

9. Pilot Scheme on Mediation of Legally Aided Matrimonial Cases

In the Final Report issued by the CJ's Working Party on Civil Justice Reform in March 2004, it recommended that the Legal Aid Department (LAD) should have power in suitable cases to limit its funding of persons who qualified for legal aid to the funding of mediation, alongside its power to fund court proceedings where mediation was inappropriate or had failed. June 2008

In order for the Administration to consider the Working Party's recommendation, the LAD launched a one-year pilot scheme on 15 March 2005 to assess the cost-effectiveness and implications of providing legal aid to cover mediation of legally aided matrimonial cases.

The Administration briefed the Panel on the final evaluation of the Pilot Scheme in June 2007. The Panel supported the Administration's proposal to extend legal aid to cover mediation in legally-aided matrimonial cases as a permanent arrangement. The Panel requested the Administration to work out a comprehensive proposal, taking into account the concerns raised, such as the funding arrangement for the proposed scheme, the level of mediators' fees, the desirability of making mediation mandatory, and the interface between mediation and legal services under the permanent arrangement as a legally-aided person and the other party involved in a matrimonial case could opt for mediation before or after the commencement of proceedings.

10. Review of the jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman

The Panel considered the Research Report on "Jurisdiction of Ombudsman Systems in Selected Places" prepared by the Research and Library Services Division of the LegCo Secretariat at its meeting on 26 June 2006. To be confirmed
by D of Adm

At the same meeting, the Ombudsman informed members that the review of the jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman would consist of two parts : Part I would be an "operational" review of the Ombudsman Ordinance (Cap. 397), and Part II a more generalized review of developments in ombudsmanship. The Ombudsman submitted Part I and Part II of the Review to the Administration in November 2006 and November 2007 respectively.

At the meetings on 13 December 2007 and 25 February 2008, the Panel discussed the Administration's initial response to the recommendations made in Part I of the Review. The Administration will formulate its final response to the recommendations made in Part I of the Review and revert to the Panel in due course.

11. Independent statutory legal aid authority

In its written response to the Panel regarding the proposed transfer of the legal aid portfolio from the Administration Wing of the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office to the Home Affairs Bureau, the LASC advised the Panel that while the majority of its members did not have strong views on the proposed transfer, it would step up its supervisory role to ensure that the provision of legal aid services was undertaken professionally and objectively without interference. The LASC also advised that it had recommended to the CE the establishment of an independent statutory legal aid authority in September 1998. Although the recommendation was not accepted by the Administration, the LASC considered it appropriate to seek a review of the issue in the current year.

May 2008

At the meeting on 22 October 2007, the Administration was requested to liaise with the LASC regarding the progress and timetable of its study and advise members of the approximate timing for reverting to the Panel.

The Administration advised on 20 December 2007 that the LASC expected to complete the study around the end of 2008. The Administration also advised that it would revert to the Panel after it had considered the outcome of LASC's study.

At the meeting on 28 January 2008, members agreed that a research study on legal aid systems in selected places should be conducted by the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) of the LegCo Secretariat. RLSD will submit an interim report to the Panel in May 2008 and the whole research report by October 2008.

12. Transcript fees

Issues relating to the fee charging mechanism for production of transcripts of court proceedings and the impact of transcript fees on litigants' ability to pursue appeals were first discussed at the Panel meeting on 23 June 2003.

2008/2009

On 15 December 2005, the Judiciary Administration (JA) briefed the Panel on its proposals on how the fees for transcript and record of

proceedings at all levels of court should be set and administered. The Panel requested the JA to reconsider whether the proposed fees could be further reduced. At the Panel meeting on 22 January 2007, the JA briefed the Panel on the newly proposed directed/authorized/administrative fees for transcript and record of proceedings. The Panel had no objection to the implementation of the revised fees with effect from 1 February 2007.

At the Panel meeting on 28 April 2008, JA reported progress on the issues raised in the course of discussing the matter at the last meeting on 22 January 2007. JA advised that -

- (a) it would conduct an overall costing review of transcript and recording services by end-2008; and
- (b) it would revert to the Panel on the proposed legislative amendments to revise/prescribe fees for transcript and record of proceedings and to provide a general power to the court to waive, reduce or defer these fees which would be introduced into LegCo in 2009.

13. Determination of judicial remuneration

In April 2003, Sir Anthony Mason's Consultancy Report (the Mason Report) on the system for the determination of judicial remuneration was submitted to the CE. The Judiciary expressed support to the recommendations and views contained in the Mason Report. In January 2004, the CE appointed the Standing Committee on Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service (the Judicial Committee) to review the judicial remuneration mechanism and make recommendations on whether the Mason Report should be accepted. The Judicial Committee submitted its report to the CE in November 2005. May 2008

In the context of discussing the budgetary arrangement and resources for the Judiciary at the Panel meeting on 28 May 2007, the Administration advised that given that the recommendations of both the Mason Report and the Report of the Judicial Committee would have very far-reaching effect on the judicial remuneration system in Hong Kong, the Administration needed some more time to consider the matter. The Panel requested the Administration to provide a paper to explain the Administration's concerns and how much longer it would take to consider the two Reports.

14. Court buildings

During a court visit by the Panel in the 2006-2007 session, members expressed the view that the design and the location of court buildings end of 2008/early 2009

should reflect the importance and dignity of the courts and the independence of the Judiciary. The interior design of court buildings such as court/waiting rooms was also important. For example, members of the Panel had previously expressed concern about the setting of juvenile courts in Magistrates Court Buildings.

JA advised in November 2007 that it planned to discuss the item with the Panel at the end of 2008 or early 2009, having regard to the scope of the subject matter.

15. Conditional fees

The Report on Conditional Fees was published by the Law Reform Commission in July 2007. At the meeting on 22 October 2007, members agreed to discuss the issue at a future Panel meeting. To be confirmed

16. Free Legal Advice Scheme

At the meeting on 22 October 2007, the Chairman proposed and the Panel agreed that it was opportune for the Administration to review the Scheme. The Panel requested the Administration to provide an information paper on the Scheme for consideration of the Panel. To be confirmed

17. Development of mediation services

Promoting the development of mediation services to alleviate conflicts and foster harmony is one of the initiatives set out in the CE's 2007-2008 Policy Address. The Administration will map out how mediation can be more effectively and extensively applied in both commercial and community disputes, with the assistance of a Working Group to be established by the SJ at the end of 2007. June 2008

At the meeting on 22 October 2007, SJ briefed members on the initiative and undertook to provide a progress report on mediation for discussion by the Panel at the June meeting.

18. Pilot Scheme for Building Management Cases

At the meeting on 13 December 2007, the Judiciary briefed the Panel on the main features of the Pilot Scheme for Building Management Cases in the Lands Tribunal to be launched on 1 January 2008. The Judiciary Administration would conduct a review to evaluate the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme after it had been launched for 12 months. The Panel agreed to follow up the matter in March or April 2009. March/April 2009

19. Operation of the Resource Centre for Unrepresented Litigants

The item was referred by the Subcommittee on Draft Subsidiary Legislation Relating to the Civil Justice Reform. When the impact of the procedural changes in the Civil Justice Reform on unrepresented litigants was discussed by the Subcommittee at the meeting on 26 March 2008, members expressed concern about the adequacy of the services currently provided by the Resource Centre for Unrepresented Litigants. Members of the Panel have agreed to include the item on this list.

To be confirmed

20. Pre-trial interviewing of witnesses by prosecutors

The Panel noted that the Prosecutions Division was conducting a monitoring exercise to collect relevant statistics and information from 1 April to 31 December 2008, with a view to assessing the need to introduce the scheme of pre-trial interviewing of witness by prosecutors. At the Panel meeting on 28 April 2008, members agreed to discuss the issue in June 2008.

June 2008