

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Employment assistance to persons with disabilities

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the employment assistance currently provided by the Administration to persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Background

2. The Administration is committed to promoting the employment of PWDs and to ensuring that they enjoy equal opportunity of participating in productive and gainful employment in the open market. We have put in place a wide range of measures to facilitate their entry into open employment in both the public and private sectors. For those who do not have the ability or are not ready to take up open employment, we provide vocational training, supported or sheltered employment.

Collaboration among Policy Bureaux and Departments

3. The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee and its Sub-committee on Employment advise the Government on all matters concerning the employment of PWDs. Its membership includes both government and non-government representatives. All relevant policy bureaux and government departments are represented on it. They work closely with each other and seek advice, where necessary, from the Sub-committee with the common goal of improving employment prospects and exploring new employment opportunities for PWDs in both the public and private sectors.

4. The Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee have designated “Promotion of Employment of PWDs” as the main theme of their public education programmes for the current year. A series of new measures have been implemented to enhance public understanding of the working capabilities of PWDs and the support services provided by government departments and rehabilitation agencies for the employment of PWDs with a view to enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration among the business sector, local communities, government departments and non-government organisations (NGOs) in promoting the employment of PWDs, thereby supporting the

self-reliance of PWDs and their full integration into the community. These measures include:

- (a) encouraging social welfare agencies to take the lead in supporting and promoting the employment of PWDs through visits, regular meetings and correspondence, and discussion with agency managements on specific follow-up measures such as setting up indicators for the employment of PWDs on a voluntary basis and formulating policies regarding the employment of PWDs;
- (b) visiting the 18 District Councils to brief their members on various services available for the employment of PWDs and to establish continuous collaborative relationship with the District Councils in organising relevant activities. This will help engage the local communities in supporting the employment of PWDs;
- (c) organising activities, such as seminars and visits, jointly with chambers of commerce, professional bodies and rehabilitation agencies to introduce to the business community (i) various support services available for employers to recruit employees with disabilities; and (ii) products and services of PWDs. This will help demonstrate PWDs' working capabilities and address the concerns of employers in employing PWDs;
- (d) setting up a dedicated website to consolidate relevant information on the employment of PWDs provided by various government departments and organisations. It will serve as an one-stop resource platform for employers, PWDs and those who are interested in procuring the products and using the services of PWDs;
- (e) subsidising community organisations in organising a variety of public education activities under the theme of " Promotion of Employment of PWDs " to enhance public understanding of the working capabilities of PWDs. This will help secure public support for self-reliance of PWDs and encourage PWDs to join hands with other members of the community to contribute to the society; and
- (f) promoting the relevant message through a series of activities launched by the Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) (MCO(R)) of the Social Welfare Department, including television and radio announcements of public interest and a drama script-writing competition etc. The MCO(R) will also organise seminars and fairs to promote the services and products of PWDs and to deepen public understanding and acceptance of PWDs.

5. The above measures have generally received positive response from social welfare agencies, District Councils and the business sector. This shows that our efforts have started to bear fruit and we shall continue to carry out the promotion work.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Training for Persons with Disabilities by the Social Welfare Department

6. To equip PWDs with job skills that meet the requirements of the job market and assist them to secure suitable employment commensurate with their abilities, the Social Welfare Department provides a range of vocational rehabilitation services and vocational training to meet the various needs of PWDs.

Sheltered Workshops

7. Sheltered workshop provides PWDs, who are not yet able to enter into open employment, with appropriate vocational training in a work environment specially designed to accommodate the limitations arising from their mental and/or physical disabilities in order to develop their social and economic potential to the fullest extent. As at March 2009, there were 35 sheltered workshops providing 5 113 places.

Supported Employment

8. Supported employment provides PWDs with vocational training, job matching as well as on-the-job and follow-through guidance services, etc. The service is an avenue for upward mobility of sheltered workshop trainees and a necessary step towards social integration for those PWDs who otherwise cannot take up open employment. As at March 2009, there were 28 NGOs providing 1 655 places.

Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres (IVRSC)

9. The Social Welfare Department has started to implement the new service delivery model of IVRSC since April 2004 through re-engineering sheltered workshop and supported employment services. IVRSC provides a series of integrated one-stop vocational rehabilitation services for PWDs to engage them in allowance-generating work skills training; adapt to the general work requirement; develop their social skills and interpersonal relationship; and get prepared for potential advancement to open employment. As at March 2009, there were 23 IVRSCs providing a total of 3 675 training places.

Integrated Vocational Training Centres

10. The Integrated Vocational Training Centres provide comprehensive and systematic vocational training for school leavers with disabilities to develop their social skills and potential and prepare them for potential advancement to open employment. As at March 2009, the two Integrated Vocational Training Centres provided a total of 453 places.

Community Mental Health Care Services

11. The Community Mental Health Care Services commenced operation in October 2005. It aims at providing vocational training programmes for the residents of halfway houses to develop and maintain their social and economic functioning as well as to assist those with good potential and employability to engage in gainful employment and meaningful activities. As at March 2009, 11 NGOs operated the service.

Vocational Training for Persons with Disabilities by the Vocational Training Council

12. The Vocational Training Council, with subventions from the Government, operates three skills centres for PWDs aged 15 and above who are assessed as having the ability to work in the open employment market. The skills centres offer a wide range of programmes at the operative level and pre-craft level in technical, commercial and service-related streams covering different occupations and trades for PWDs. The objective is to enhance the employability of PWDs and prepare them for eventual open employment. In the 2008/09 academic year, the three skills centres offered a total of 660 full-time training places for PWDs, including 120 boarding places. According to the last round of employment survey conducted in January 2008 for graduates of the skills centres in the 2006/07 academic year, the employment rate for those actively seeking employment was 87%.

13. The training programmes of the skills centres are reviewed regularly to ensure that the training courses offered and planned match the occupational skills required locally and meet the needs of the employment market.

Training Courses for Persons with Disabilities by the Employees Retraining Board

14. The Employees Retraining Board also provides full time placement-tied vocational training courses for PWDs and industrial accident

victims. These retraining courses cover a wide range of trades and job types, such as retailing, telemarketing, webpage design and production, digital photography and video production, computer application and clerical support. Thorough assessment on trainees' abilities, induction of workplace adaptation and mentality shaping, as well as employment assistance would be provided as part of the training. In order to assist the trainees to acquire suitable jobs and be continuously employed, employment follow-up services of a duration of six months, including adaptation training, in service mentoring and personal counselling and visits are offered. Special employment assistance is also available for those who have particular difficulty in seeking employment. In the past five years, close to 1 000 trainees enrolled into these courses each year.

Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities by the Labour Department

15. The Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department provides a personalised employment service to help place PWDs in open employment. Apart from providing employment counselling and arranging job matching and referral, the placement officer will prepare PWDs for job interviews beforehand and, where necessary, accompany them to attend such interviews. When a job seeker has been placed, the placement officer will provide follow-up service.

16. In 2008, the Labour Department provided employment assistance to 3 327 job seekers with disabilities and successfully helped 2 490 of them find employment in the open market. During the first four months of this year, the Labour Department registered 941 job seekers with disabilities and helped place 578 of them in employment.

Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS)

17. The Selective Placement Division administers WOPS, which aims at encouraging employers to offer job vacancies for PWDs through a trial placement. On joining WOPS, job seekers with disabilities will undergo a short pre-employment training programme to improve their job search skills, interviewing techniques, communication and interpersonal skills, etc. For each PWDs engaged under the scheme, participating employers will receive a financial incentive. In the financial year 2009/10, the Government has further enhanced WOPS by increasing the financial incentive to a rate equal to two-third of the monthly salary paid to PWDs, or \$4,000, whichever is the lower, for a maximum period of six months.

18. There was an enthusiastic response to WOPS since it was first launched in April 2005. As at 30 April 2009, the scheme recorded a total of 2 777 vacancies and achieved 1 312 work placements.

Self Help Integrated Placement Service (SHIPS)

19. The Labour Department also administers SHIPS to encourage and help job seekers with disabilities to be more proactive and independent in their job search by equipping them with the necessary knowledge on labour market situation, job search channels and interviewing techniques etc.

Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities by the Social Welfare Department

On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities (OJT) and Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities (Sunnyway)

20. The Social Welfare Department administers OJT and the Sunnyway programme to provide proactive training and encourage the participation of employers so as to enhance the employability and work opportunities of PWDs. Sunnyway targets at young people, aged between 15 to 25, with disabilities or early signs of mental illness. Job attachment is a core component whereby, with the purpose of learning, PWDs will be trained to enhance their employability. Participants in job attachment will receive a training allowance of \$1,250 per month for a maximum of 3 months, and this training allowance is not regarded as a job-related salary. Besides, wage subsidy will be provided to the employers to encourage them to try out the work abilities of PWDs. The employer will receive a wage subsidy at a rate of half of the salary given to the worker or \$3,000, whichever is the lower, for a maximum of three months. In addition, individual counselling, training and post-placement services will be rendered. Sunnyway will provide an additional 180 hours of employment training to each participant.

21. As at March 2009, there were 14 NGOs operating 432 OJT places and 16 NGOs operating 311 Sunnyway places.

Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise (3E's Project)

22. In 2001/02, the Social Welfare Department was granted a one-off provision of \$50 million to implement a project in the name of "Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise" (3E's Project). Through payment of grants as seed money, NGOs are assisted to set up small enterprises/businesses to create employment opportunities for PWDs,

and provide PWDs with genuine employment in a carefully planned and sympathetic work environment. In these small enterprises/businesses, the number of employees with disabilities should not be less than 50% of the total number of employees and a proper employer-employee relationship is expected. Each funded project will be offered a grant not exceeding \$2 million for the first two years' operation and the business is expected to become self-sustaining thereafter.

23. As at March 2009, a total sum of around \$30 million has been granted under the 3E's Project to support 23 NGOs to set up 51 businesses of various natures including cleaning, catering, car beauty, massage, retail shops, vegetable supply and processing, household service, travelling agency, etc. These businesses have created a total of 602 employment opportunities, in which 436 were tailor-made for PWDs.

Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation)(MCO(R))

24. At the same time, MCO(R) of the Social Welfare Department adopts innovative, effective and efficient business development and marketing approaches to enhance employment and training opportunities for PWDs. Services of MCO(R) include assisting NGOs in the setting up of small enterprises/businesses under the 3E's Project; promoting the products and services of PWD; strengthening NGOs' co-operation with the government and private sectors; co-ordinating NGOs to secure job orders; providing business consultations for NGOs; and organising marketing events and publicity activities to promote the working abilities of PWDs and the brand name of "SEPD" (Support the Employment of People with Disabilities) which is a registered trademark for the products and services of PWDs.

Measures to Encourage Government Departments and Public Bodies to Employ Persons with Disabilities

25. As the largest employer in Hong Kong, the Government fully recognises the importance of taking a lead in employing PWDs in order to help them integrate into the community.

26. The Government seeks to place PWDs in appropriate jobs whenever possible and welcomes applications from them for both civil service and non-civil service vacancies. Disabled applicants who meet the basic entry requirements for a post will not be subject to any further short-listing criteria and will be automatically invited to attend the selection interview. In addition, disabled candidates would be given an appropriate degree of preference. Once

they are considered suitable by the selection board to carry out the duties of a particular post, they would normally be recommended for appointment even though they may not be able, due to their disabilities, to perform the duties of every post in the same rank.

27. We also provide on-the-job assistance to officers with disabilities to facilitate them in carrying out their duties. Such assistance may take the form of modifications to work areas and facilities (e.g. modifying the office door to facilitate smooth passage of wheelchairs); appropriate changes to job design or work schedules (e.g. placing mentally handicapped staff in less demanding jobs and not assigning outdoor duties to physically handicapped staff); provision of necessary equipment, etc. A central fund with a commitment of \$4.4 million was established for the purchase of technical aids for disabled government employees. So far, a total of about \$3.88 million has been disbursed from the fund for the purchase of technical aids such as computer with Braille display, scanner, hearing aids, etc. for 87 disabled employees.

28. We have been devoting efforts to promoting the Government's policy on employment of PWDs in the civil service as well as cultivating peer acceptance of the disabled staff. This is done through publications issued to departments, which introduce the said policy and provide practical tips on how to work with disabled staff, and insertion of relevant contents into the various training courses for human resources managers and new recruits to the civil service. As part of our initiatives to promote employment of PWDs in the civil service and ensure compliance of the policy by departments, the Civil Service Bureau has been conducting visits to departments and attending as observers recruitment interviews involving disabled candidates. So far, we have conducted visits to 19 departments in our latest round of departmental visits.

29. As at 31 March 2008, there were 3 225 disabled civil servants, representing around 2.1% of the strength of the civil service. As at the same date, 287 disabled persons were employed by the Government on non-civil service terms. A breakdown of these figures is at the Annex.

30. In addition, the Social Welfare Department has extended the job attachment scheme under its Sunnyway programme to policy bureaux and government departments since February 2006. As at May 2009, 141 participants of the programme have been placed at various policy bureaux and government departments. The Social Welfare Department is continuing its efforts in inviting policy bureaux and government departments regularly to identify more job attachment places for youngsters with disabilities who have joined the Sunnyway programme.

31. On the other hand, the Government has mobilised all policy bureaux and government departments to encourage the public bodies and subvented organisations under their policy purview to adopt a host of measures to further promote the employment of PWDs. These measures include setting up indicators for the employment of PWDs on a voluntary basis; formulating policies and procedures regarding the employment of PWDs by drawing reference to those for the civil service; and publishing the numbers of employees with disabilities in their annual reports. The Labour and Welfare Bureau has also regularly conducted tracking survey to understand the implementation progress of relevant measures of such bodies and organisations. We plan to conduct a new round of tracking survey in the second half of 2009.

Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW) and Special Arrangement for Persons with Disabilities

32. As a matter of principle, PWDs, as employees, should be no different from their able-bodied counterparts and thus PWDs taking up employment in the open market should also be protected by SMW.

33. To gauge the views of stakeholders, the Labour Department has conducted formal and informal sessions with more than 50 rehabilitation organisations including NGOs providing vocational rehabilitation service, self-help groups and parent groups, representatives of employers who have ample experience in employing PWDs as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission.

34. Recognising the possible employment difficulties encountered by some PWDs, the majority view gauged is that, in order to strike a reasonable balance between providing wage protection to PWDs and safeguarding the employment opportunities of those PWDs whose productivity is adversely affected by their disabilities, a special arrangement comprising a mechanism to assess a PWD's productivity should be introduced to help determine whether a PWD should be remunerated at no less than SMW; and if not, the extent of discount from SMW. To avoid abuse by unscrupulous employers, the assessment should be initiated by PWD. The assessment should be simple, situational and conducted in the actual performance of his job duties.

35. The Labour Department has reported the progress of the subject to the Labour Advisory Board and the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower in February 2009. They generally agreed with the proposed arrangement. We would continue to work with stakeholders including rehabilitation organisations on the implementation details of the assessment mechanism.

Conclusion

36. The Administration is sparing no effort in helping PWDs find jobs in the open employment market, or equip them with necessary skills that meet market requirements through vocational training and vocational rehabilitation services. We will continue to explore viable measures to further enhance the employment opportunities of PWDs.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Civil Service Bureau
Social Welfare Department
Labour Department
June 2009

**Statistics on Disabled Civil Servants and
Government Staff Employed on Non-civil Service Terms
(as at 31.3.2008)**

Disability group	Number of civil servants with disabilities	Number of staff employed on non-civil service terms with disabilities
Visual impairment	497 (15.41%)	40 (13.94%)
Hearing impairment	280 (8.68%)	53 (18.47%)
Physical handicap	1 742 (54.02%)	109 (37.98%)
Mental handicap	20 (0.62%)	4 (1.39%)
With history of mental illness	284 (8.81%)	37 (12.89%)
Visceral disability	389 (12.06%)	38 (13.24%)
Others (e.g. autism, speech impairment)	13 (0.40%)	6 (2.09%)
Total	3 225	287