

For discussion on
2 February 2010

Legislative Council Panel on Security Employment Service Support for Rehabilitated Offenders

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the employment service support provided by the Correctional Services Department (CSD) for persons under its custody, and the services provided to rehabilitated persons by other related government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) after their discharge. It also explains the government's recruitment policy in respect of rehabilitated persons.

Background

2. Apart from the provision of a safe and humane environment for the detention of inmates, CSD is also committed to facilitating the return of rehabilitated persons to the community through the provision of suitable rehabilitative services. These include vocational training and psychological/counselling services provided in correctional institutions, referrals to suitable government departments or NGOs for follow-up support and services upon discharge, and different education and publicity campaigns to appeal for community support for offender rehabilitation. The main purposes are to facilitate the re-integration of rehabilitated persons into society and to enhance their employment opportunities.

Employment Service Support for Rehabilitated Persons

(A) Pre-release Services

Vocational Training

3. To enhance the chance of rehabilitated persons in securing gainful employment after release, different vocational training courses are

provided to local inmates in correctional institutions. At present, inmates aged under 21 are provided with half-day general education and half-day vocational training. Full-time vocational training courses are offered to adult local inmates with remaining sentences from six to 24 months, who may take up such courses on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, CSD has secured the support of a number of NGOs and agencies in providing part-time vocational training for adult local inmates.

4. All adult inmates, except those who are physically unfit, are required by law to engage in useful work. This enables them to develop good work habits and a sense of responsibility, and to acquire the basic skills in specific trades. With a view to enhancing the employability of rehabilitated persons upon discharge, CSD has strengthened the vocational training elements in the industrial production process in prison workshops since February 2009. More inmates now receive vocational training and attain external accreditation and recognised qualifications in the course of their work.

5. CSD will keep its provision of vocational training to inmates under constant review. It will continue to work with related organisations/agencies such as Employees Retraining Board, Construction Industry Council Training Academy and Vocational Training Council in devising suitable and market-oriented vocational training courses for inmates. It is planned that in 2010, 922 part-time and 225 full-time training places will be provided for adult inmates. This represents a 22% increase in the number of training places as compared with 2009.

Education Service

6. The Education Unit of CSD provides half-day compulsory education programme for inmates under the age of 21. For adult inmates who wish to pursue academic studies after work, staff of the Education Unit will provide guidance and advice to them, as well as help them enrol in suitable courses and apply for relevant financial assistance¹. Furthermore, to enhance language and computer education, multi-media learning centres have been set up in all institutions for young inmates.

¹ Financial assistance includes subsidies from “Prisoners Education Trust Fund”, “New Life Foundation”, “Prisoners’ Education Subsidy Fund” and the Open University of Hong Kong.

Pre-release Re-integration Orientation Course

7. All inmates are arranged to take part in the “Pre-release Reintegration Orientation Course” before discharge. The course covers general information on social services and organisations which are of particular relevance to rehabilitated persons. It includes, for example, a brief introduction on social welfare services and community service facilities, information on government and voluntary agencies which offer assistance to rehabilitated persons in finding jobs, job interview skills, and labour legislation.

(B) Post-release Services

Referrals to Government Departments/NGOs

8. The above services are provided to inmates whilst they are under CSD’s custody. CSD’s staff members are not generally allowed to communicate with discharged inmates². Therefore, post-release support services to rehabilitated persons are generally provided by other government departments such as Social Welfare Department (SWD) and NGOs. Nonetheless, to facilitate the provision of post-release support services, CSD’s Rehabilitation Officers would take the initiative to identify the needs and possible difficulties that inmates are expected to encounter after their discharge. With the consent of the inmates concerned, CSD would refer their cases to relevant government departments and NGOs prior to their release for early follow-up actions. For instance, inmates with potential financial or housing difficulties will be assisted in their applications to SWD for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, or the Housing Department for public housing before discharge, as appropriate.

Support Services provided by SWD and NGOs

9. Since October 2006, the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP)³ is a core NGO that has been providing

² Apart from those ex-prisoners who are supervisees undergoing statutory post-release supervision upon discharge from correctional institutions, CSD’s staff members are not allowed to communicate with discharged prisoners in accordance with section 239(1)(h)(i) of the Prison Rules (Cap. 234A).

³ SRACP is the major provider of post-release support services to rehabilitated persons. Under SWD’s programme on services for rehabilitated persons, annual subventions of about \$1.33 million are provided to SRACP to provide employment support for rehabilitated persons.

follow-up employment services for rehabilitated persons who had completed pre-release vocational training provided by CSD. The Employment Development Unit (EDU) of SRACP will assist rehabilitated persons in finding jobs, with a view to helping them become self-reliant as early as possible. With funding from SWD, SRACP has been providing short-term rental assistance and enhanced employment service to assist discharged inmates in job matching and placement according to their knowledge, ability, interest, expectations and the labour market trend since March 2007. Currently, SRACP operates four EDUs targeting to refer 1 200 discharged inmates to job interviews and to place 600 discharged inmates in jobs in a year. In the past five years, the EDUs have successfully secured employment for over 2 500 rehabilitated persons.

(C) Community Engagement

10. Whether a rehabilitated person could find a job upon discharge and reintegrate back to society successfully is not only affected by support services provided by government departments and NGOs, but also their motivation, as well as community acceptance of rehabilitated persons. In this connection, CSD has organised different education and publicity campaigns to appeal for community's support for offender rehabilitation.

11. To enlist employers' support for offender rehabilitation, CSD has been working to forge a stronger partnership with the commercial sector. For example, CSD has lined up the co-operation of a restaurant group and SRACP for the establishment of a social enterprise to provide employment opportunities for rehabilitated persons. The Department will continue to facilitate similar collaboration for the benefit of rehabilitated persons.

12. In addition, CSD will continue to organise symposiums on employment for rehabilitated persons, as well as employers' visits to correctional institutions. These activities promote better understanding of the Department's rehabilitation services, and the vocational training courses for inmates by prospective employers and encourage them to offer job opportunities to rehabilitated persons to facilitate their rehabilitation.

Recruitment Policy of the Government

13. Appointments to the civil service are based on the principle of open and fair competition. In considering applications for civil service posts,

the recruiting department/grade will select the most suitable candidate for the post concerned, having regard to the applicant's character, qualifications, abilities and merits.

14. To ensure that all civil servants are of good character and high integrity and can be entrusted to perform the relevant duties, all recruiting departments/grades will require those candidates who are initially considered suitable for appointment to provide information for the purpose of integrity checking. Under the existing arrangement, if a rehabilitated person meets the entry requirements for a job and is shortlisted for appointment, he/she will not be disqualified for appointment solely because of his/her being a rehabilitated person. The recruiting department/grade, in deciding whether the individual candidate should be appointed, will take into account such considerations as the nature and seriousness of the offence, its relevance to the duties of the post and the operational needs of the post. Each case will be considered on its own merits.

Advice Sought

15. Members are invited to note the employment service support for rehabilitated offenders as set out in the paper.

Security Bureau
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