

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1747/09-10(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 June 2010**

Vocational rehabilitation services and training for persons with disabilities

Purpose

This paper provides an account of the discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on the provision of vocational rehabilitation services and training for persons with disabilities ("PWDs").

Background

2. According to the Administration, the overall objective of the rehabilitation policy is to support the full integration of PWDs into the community. A series of rehabilitation services, community support and training are provided to facilitate PWDs to live independently, and/or to live with their families and friends in the community. 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 ("SWD") provides a range of vocational rehabilitation services and vocational training to meet the various needs of PWDs. For those who cannot live on their own and cannot be adequately cared for by their families, a three-pronged approach has been adopted in accordance with the 2007 Rehabilitation Programme Plan to implement the following measures –

- (a) to regulate the residential care homes for PWDs so as to ensure their service quality on the one hand while helping the market to develop residential care homes of different types and operational modes on the other;
- (b) to support non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") to develop self-financing homes; and

- (c) to continue to steadily increase the number of subsidised residential care home places.

Deliberations by the Panel

Vocational rehabilitation services for PWDs

Sheltered workshops

3. Sheltered workshops provide 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.

4. At the meeting on 10 February 2003, the Panel was briefed on the Administration's future service direction to support PWDs. The Administration informed the Panel that based on the findings of an internal value for money audit study conducted by SWD on sheltered workshops and supported employment services in 2002, it was recommended that in the long run, integrated service delivery model comprising sheltered workshop, supported employment, skills centres, On the Job Training Programme and Small Enterprise Project in vocational rehabilitation services should be adopted. An integrated vocational centre could better meet the vocational needs of PWDs and address the problems of compartmentalization in service delivery. Under the proposed new service delivery mode, trainees could have access to vocational rehabilitation services at one single service point.

5. With regard to some members' concern about the possible closing down of all sheltered workshops, the Administration assured members that it had no intention of doing so. The reason for conducting the value for money audits on sheltered workshops and supported employment services was to find out how these two services could be operated in a more cost-effective manner. Owing to the economic downturn and the fading out of small production industries in Hong Kong, it had become more difficult for sheltered workshops to secure income-generating work for their users.

6. The Administration further advised that NGO operators supported in principle the model of integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres ("IVRSCs"). However, concerned parties considered it necessary to work out a more detailed operational and implementation plan and to test the new model on

a pilot basis. SWD would seek the views of the stakeholders on the implementation issues.

IVRSCs

7. The Administration briefed the Panel on the progress on the pilot IVRSCs on 20 April 2005. The Administration advised that it had invited NGOs in August 2003 to re-engineer their subvented vocational rehabilitation services to form IVRSCs on a pilot basis. SWD had approved the formation of 14 IVRSCs through pooling of subventions of 2 043 places of 14 sheltered workshops and 485 supported employment places on 1 April 2004. Taking into account the conversion of two sheltered workshops operated by SWD to IVRSCs after their hiving off to NGOs in April 2004, and a new IVRSC which commenced operation in October 2004, there were 17 IVRSCs in April 2005 providing a total of 2 889 training places.

8. The Administration further advised that a Working Group comprising representatives of SWD, NGO operators, parents of PWDs was formed in June 2004 to review the implementation of IVRSCs and advise on the future development of the service. The Working Group generally recognised that IVRSCs would have many advantages over the traditional sheltered workshops and sheltered employment services. An integrated vocational centre would provide a holistic approach to meet the needs of PWDs by offering a greater variety of training programmes, and allowing flexibility in service delivery and deployment of staff and resources.

9. Members expressed support for providing PWDs with one-stop integrated and seamless vocational services so as to better accommodate the limitations arising from their disabilities. Some members enquired about the timetable for conversion of the existing 36 sheltered workshops into IVRSCs. The Administration responded that it had no fixed timetable for the conversion. It had deliberately not made the re-engineering exercise compulsory, as the success of the exercise must depend on the support of parents of PWDs and the staff concerned. As regards staff members, they would need to undergo special training programmes in order to meet the challenges arising from the implementation of the new service delivery mode.

10. The Administration added that PWDs would continue to be given the choice to join the sheltered workshops, sheltered employment or IVRSC services.

Vocational training for PWDs

11. The Panel held a joint meeting with the Panel on Manpower on 6 July 2006 to discuss measures to promote employment opportunities for PWDs.

Members were advised that the Vocational Training Council (VTC), with subventions from the Government, operated three skills centres for PWDs aged 15 and above who were assessed as having the ability to work in the open market. The skills centres offered 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 was to enhance the employability of PWDs and prepare them for eventual open employment.

12. Some members expressed concern about the high unemployment rate of PWDs. The Administration responded that it was the Government's policy to assist PWDs to develop their personal capabilities in order to secure jobs in the open market. With this policy objective in mind, SWD provided a full range of rehabilitation and vocational training services to equip PWDs for employment. The Administration also stepped up publicity to promote equal employment opportunities for PWDs, and encouraged employers to offer more employment to them. The Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department provided personalised employment assistance to PWDs, with the objective of placing them into jobs that best suited their abilities. The employment services included vocational assessment and counselling, job matching and referral, as well as follow-up service after placement.

Question raised at Council meeting

13. An oral question raised by Mr WONG Sing-chi at the Council meeting on 2 June 2010 was related to the vocational rehabilitation services for disabled adults. The Administration's reply to the question is in the **Appendix**.

Relevant papers

14. Members are invited to access the LegCo website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk> to view the minutes and relevant papers of the meetings of the Panel on 10 February 2003 and 20 April 2005, and the joint meeting of the Panel and the Panel on Manpower on 6 July 2006.

**"Subject to the actual answer
given at the Council Meeting"**

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 4
(Oral Reply)

Asked by: Hon WONG Sing-chi

Date of meeting: 2 June 2010

**Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and Welfare**

Question:

Some organizations have relayed to me that the services currently provided by the Government to persons with disabilities are inadequate, including the provision of opportunities for continuing education, employment assistance, places available in sheltered workshops, and support to family carers, etc. In this connection, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

- (a) whether they know, in each of the past five years, the number of persons with intellectual disability ("ID") who managed to pursue continuing education after completing their education in special schools; of the number of persons with ID who were not able to receive continuing education because of the lack of financial assistance (such as the Tertiary Student Finance Scheme - Publicly-funded Programmes, the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students and other relevant loan schemes), as well as the reasons for their not receiving financial assistance; whether there is any financial assistance scheme exclusively for persons with ID; of the number of cases in which persons with ID succeeded in seeking employment under the assistance of the Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department, and the reasons why the others who sought assistance did not succeed in seeking employment;
- (b) of the current number of places provided by all the sheltered workshops in Hong Kong and the average waiting time for admission to such workshops; of the number of places provided by the Government in sheltered workshops for severely physically handicapped persons in the past five years, as well as the number of persons on the waiting list at present; of the timetable for the commissioning of additional Day Activity Centres (including those located in West Kowloon); and
- (c) of the percentage of carers of persons with ID among the service users of District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities, Parents/Relatives Resource Centres for Disabled Persons and Community-based Support Projects for Persons with Disabilities and their Families in each of the past five years, together with a breakdown by District Council district?

Reply:

President,

The overall objective of the rehabilitation policy in Hong Kong is to help persons with disabilities (PWDs) develop their physical and mental capabilities as well as their ability to integrate into the community through a comprehensive range of effective measures. This is to ensure that PWDs can participate in full and enjoy equal opportunities both in terms of their social life and personal growth. We will continue to provide PWDs and their carers with suitable service and support according to the strategic development directions set out in the 2007 Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan. My reply to the different parts of Hon WONG Sing-chi's question regarding provision of continuing education, employment and vocational rehabilitation for PWDs, as well as community support for carers, is as follows –

- (a) The policy objective of special education is to provide an appropriate learning environment for students with special educational needs so as to facilitate their education and help them develop their potential to the full, thereby enhancing their independent living and adaptation skills and enabling them to integrate into the community. Having completed education in schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools), students will pursue other education/ training opportunities or receive rehabilitation service having regard to their abilities, specific needs, temperament and interest. According to the information collected by the Education Bureau from the ID schools, in the past five years, an average of about 45% of the school leavers from the ID schools received vocational training. A majority of them received training from the Skills Centres under the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and the Integrated Vocational Training Centres subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). A small number of them received training from the "Pro-Act by VTC" or the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education under VTC. The number of students with ID receiving such training is set out at Annex. The remaining school leavers mainly received vocational rehabilitation training, day training service and/or residential care service, etc. in Sheltered Workshops (SWs)/Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Service Centres (IVRSCs), Day Activity Centres (DACs) and residential care homes for PWDs subvented by SWD.

If the courses pursued by the school leavers of the ID schools are covered by the financial assistance schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA), and the students meet the relevant eligibility criteria, they can receive financial assistance. Although SFAA does not administer any scheme to provide assistance exclusively for persons with ID,

all students (including persons with ID) can receive financial assistance if they meet the eligibility criteria of the relevant financial assistance schemes of SFAA. The Government does not have any record on the number of persons with ID who are not able to receive continuing education because of the lack of student financial assistance and the reasons involved.

In respect of the assistance to job-seekers with disabilities (including job-seekers with ID) provided by the Labour Department (LD), the Selective Placement Division (SPD) of LD registered an average of around 730 job-seekers with ID each year in the past five years. Of these, around 670 placements were achieved annually. For instance, SPD registered 696 job seekers with ID and 673 placements were secured in 2009. According to SPD's experience, whether placement of job-seeker with ID can be successful depends on the circumstances of individual case and many other factors, for example, the experience and skills of the job-seekers, interview performance and self-confidence and competition from other job-seekers etc. In this regard, to enhance the competitiveness of job-seekers with disabilities (including job-seekers with ID), SPD helps improve their understanding on job search strategies, interviewing techniques and interpersonal/communication skills through pre-employment training. In addition, to increase the employment opportunities of job-seekers with disabilities, SPD also assists them in acquiring the latest labour market information and steps up effort in promoting employment for PWDs to employers. To this end, since 2005, SPD has implemented the "Work Orientation and Placement Scheme" to offer financial incentive to employers so as to encourage them to employ PWDs through a trial placement.

- (b) In providing employment support, relevant Government departments and organisations strive to provide PWDs (including persons with ID) with a wide range of vocational rehabilitation, training and employment services so as to equip them with skills that meet market requirements and assist them in securing employment commensurate with their abilities. Apart from the employment services provided by LD, the three Skill Centres of VTC offer free full-time training courses for PWDs aged 15 or above who are assessed as having the ability to work in the open market. Furthermore, the Employees Retraining Board offers retraining courses for PWDs aged 15 or above with education level at sub-degree or below. These courses are free of charge and training allowance is provided. SWD also provides PWDs with free day training and vocational rehabilitation services to improve their social adjustment ability and enhance their social and vocational skills. PWDs who reach the age of 15 can apply for suitable services through referrals by school social workers, medical social workers, family caseworkers or staff of rehabilitation service units.

SWD provides various vocational rehabilitation services including vocational rehabilitation services in SWs which aims to cater for PWDs who are not yet able to take up open employment. With appropriate vocational training in a specially designed work environment, PWDs can learn to adapt to normal work requirements, develop social skills and relationships, and prepare for potential advancement to supported and open employment.

As at March 2010, SWD provided a total of 5 133 SW places. SWD will also provide 420 additional places of IVRSCs in 2010-11 to provide PWDs with one-stop service, including SW service and Supported Employment service. In 2009-10, the average waiting time for SWs was about 14 months. Since the target group of SW covers persons with varying disabilities (including persons with ID and persons with physical disability), SWD's computerised systems do not capture data in relation to the disability types of service users and applicants on the waiting list.

Apart from the SW service, SWD also provides day care service and training on daily living and simple work skills for persons with ID in DACs so as to help them become more independent in daily living and prepare them for more comprehensive integration into the community. As at March 2010, SWD provided a total of 4 495 DAC places. In 2010-11, there will be an additional provision of 137 places, of which 82 are in the Western Kowloon region.

- (c) SWD set up 16 District Support Centres (DSCs) for PWDs in 2009 to strengthen the support and training for PWDs and their carers, thereby enhancing the caring capability of carers, relieving their burden and stress and improving their quality of life. Together with Parents/Relatives Resource Centres (PRCs) and community-based support projects, these 16 DSCs aim at providing more comprehensive community support services for PWDs and their carers.

As at March 2010, the total registered family members for the 6 PRCs were around 4 800 persons, including persons with ID and persons with physical disability, as well as their families. SWD's computerised systems do not capture data in relation to the disability types of service users and applicants on the waiting list. As there is no service quota system for DSCs and community-based support projects for PWDs, carers can directly approach the service units for participating in their activities and receiving services. Hence, we do not have statistics on the number of users of the relevant services.

Annex

School Year	Number of school leavers from ID schools receiving vocational training
2004/05	174
2005/06	205
2006/07	181
2007/08	133
2008/09	216