

For discussion on
22 May 2017

**Legislative Council Panel on
Administration of Justice and Legal Services**

Launch of Hong Kong e-Legislation

Purpose

Hong Kong e-legislation (*HKeL*), the new electronic legislation database, was launched on 24 February 2017. This paper briefs Members on the consultation, training and publicity work carried out before the launch, the challenges and issues arising since the launch and the latest developments.

Background

2. The former legislation database, Bilingual Laws Information System (*BLIS*), was commissioned about 20 years ago. The contents did not have legal status. Its technical platform had become outdated and a new platform was required to replace it. The new system, HKeL, has been built on a more advanced and secured online platform. It provides additional functionalities that could not be provided under BLIS (for example, the choice to view legislation in monolingual or bilingual mode; improved search functions; and a subscription update service).

Pre-launch consultation, training and publicity work

Consultation with Hong Kong Legislation Database User Liaison Group

3. In September 2013, a “Hong Kong Legislation Database User Liaison Group” (*Liaison Group*) was established to provide input into the project from the users’ perspective. The Liaison Group comprises representatives from the legal professional bodies (the Hong Kong Bar Association and the Law Society of Hong Kong), the Judiciary and the Legal Service Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat.

4. The Liaison Group’s views have been a matter of great importance to us. Liaison Group members (or their representatives) gave us valuable

feedback throughout the Project and many of their suggestions were adopted. At its meeting held on 10 January 2017, Liaison Group members agreed to various matters, including the design of the webpages and functions in HKeL, and our proposed launch of HKeL on 24 February 2017.

AJLS Panel

5. On 16 January 2017, we submitted an information paper to the Panel (see LC Paper No. CB(4)430/16-17(01)) to report on the February launch of HKeL.

Briefing for users before the launch of HKeL

6. Shortly before the launch of HKeL, we provided briefing sessions so as to explain to users the major functions of HKeL and how to update printed verified copies –

- (a) 3 briefing sessions arranged through the relevant Liaison Group members for the legal professional bodies and the Legal Service Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat were held on 20, 21 and 22 February 2017; and
- (b) 2 briefing sessions were held for support staff in the Judiciary, Legislative Council Secretariat and public libraries, and to the university law librarians on 6 and 22 February 2017.

Other publicity work

7. A series of publicity work was carried out in January and February 2017 introducing the launch of HKeL, including –

- (a) a circular was issued to members of the Hong Kong Bar Association on 24 January 2017 by the Association's representative in the Liaison Group, introducing the launch of HKeL and inviting members to the HKeL briefing session;
- (b) the Law Draftsman was interviewed by the ***Hong Kong Lawyer***, and an article featured in the February 2017 issue of the journal with a focus on the proposed launch of HKeL on 24 February;

- (c) an information sheet with guidelines on how to use HKeL was issued to various parties during the few days before the launch, including the President of the Law Society of Hong Kong, the Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Deans of the 3 Law Faculties in Hong Kong, the Judiciary Administrator, the Secretary General of the Legislative Council, the Consuls-General and the heads of various Government bureaux and departments and statutory bodies; and
- (d) notice of the proposed change was given to people accessing the BLIS website from 20 to 24 February 2017, as the first entry on the BLIS homepage and by way of a pop-up window display of an “important notice” about the proposed launch.

8. On 20 February 2017, a press release was issued informing the public of the launch of HKeL.

HKeL users’ concerns since the launch of HKeL

9. HKeL was officially launched on the evening of 24 February 2017. While we have received some positive feedback from some users since its launch, we have also received reports from other users with various concerns. In short, users’ concerns can be classified into the following main categories –

- (a) performance of loading or displaying lengthy chapters in HTML format;
- (b) lack of PDF copies for some chapters;
- (c) user interface;
- (d) internet search engine results not displaying HKeL search results; and
- (e) HTML printing in bilingual view.

10. Once we were aware of the users’ concerns, we contacted the outside contractor, Azeus Systems Limited (*Contractor*), to discuss the matters with a view to resolving the technical issues. At the same time, in order to provide users with the advantages of HKeL and the safety net of

BLIS if any difficulty were encountered, we reactivated BLIS on 27 February 2017. To support new HKeL users, an email enquiry address was set up and emails received were promptly answered. Further, a telephone hotline was provided to the public from 27 February 2017 to 21 March 2017.

Actions taken to address HKeL users' concerns

Performance of loading or displaying lengthy chapters

11. On 17 March 2017, a patch was deployed to the new system. Navigation of whole chapters became smoother in HTML format by loading a “chunk” of the chapter at a time or by using the headings of the Table of Contents in a panel on the left hand side. After deployment of the patch, the performance issue received less negative feedback. We have requested the Contractor to continue to rectify the performance and related issues.

PDF copies

12. In HKeL, for chapters that have already been verified, users could obtain both verified PDF copy (with legal status) and information-only PDF copy (with no legal status) from the Download area of the chapter. Because of the difficulties with HTML performance and printing, we have started to add PDF copies for not-yet verified chapters progressively to HKeL until the verified copies are available. Meantime, users may download information-only PDF copies in BLIS if HKeL PDF copies are not yet available.

User interface and needs and views of users

13. We attach great importance to a quality user experience. We will continue to listen to the views of HKeL users and, with the assistance of the Contractor, are keeping the new system under review. Adjustments and enhancements will be made as appropriate and feasible to best meet users' needs.

14. We acknowledge that the user interface for HKeL is different from the user interface for BLIS. The new interface was designed after examining the user interface of similar systems in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Understandably, it takes time and effort for users to become familiar with it. Retaining the old interface was not possible for technical reasons. However, we aimed to make the transition from BLIS

to HKeL as easy as possible for everyone so a number of aids are provided on the HKeL website to help HKeL users (please see paragraph 18 below).

Access through general search engines

15. For a new website like HKeL, it takes time for search engine companies (for example, Google and Yahoo!) to build up their indexes to show a result from a new website at the top of a list of search results. We contacted the major search engine companies to advise them of the new website and took steps to accelerate the internal updating processes. After over 2 months of indexing and crawling, significant progress has already been made. If a search in Google or Yahoo! is now performed for a chapter number, a direct link to the relevant webpage in HKeL now appears in the first page of the search results and sometimes at the top of the list of search results. It is anticipated that with the further accumulation of access to HKeL at the users' end, search results will continue to improve over time.

HTML printing in bilingual view

16. Occasionally, the last line on a bilingual HTML printout may be split into 2 pages. We are advised this is because of the technical limitation with browser printing, particularly in Google Chrome. The Contractor has duly reported the issue to the browser companies and fixes are expected.

Other assistance offered to HKeL users

17. Numerous training sessions have been offered. As at 15 May 2017, 12 sessions for Government users and 7 sessions for non-Government users have been held, including 3 CPD courses organized by the Law Society of Hong Kong on 21 April 2017 and 11 May 2017. A briefing at a Friday Tea Gathering organized by Hon Dennis Kwok will be held on 26 May 2017.

18. In addition, there are various features in HKeL to assist users –

- (a) there are 2 documents (namely “What is HKeL” and “How to use HKeL”) as quick reference guides for users to familiarize themselves with HKeL;
- (b) there are slideshows with step-by-step demonstrations of the

search and subscription functions in HKeL;

- (c) there is a document “How to perform basic BLIS functions under HKeL” to assist users to transition from BLIS to HKeL; and
- (d) there are video clips to explain to users how to update and maintain hard copies of verified chapters.

Conclusion

19. The launch of HKeL aims to facilitate easy access to Hong Kong legislation. We attach great importance to the performance of HKeL and the views of users. We will continue to work closely with the Contractor so as to address such concerns as may be raised by users. Needless to say, we also welcome views from Members of this Panel.

Department of Justice
May 2017