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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 14 April 2025

Background brief on promoting digital inclusion

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's work on promoting digital inclusion. It also summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members on relevant issues at meetings of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting ("the Panel") in recent years.

Background

2. Digital technology is closely related to people's daily lives. The use of such technology, such as mobile communications, online shopping and electronic payment, has become the common parts of many people's daily lives. In order to allow members of our society to enjoy the benefits of digital technology, the Digital Policy Office ("DPO") promotes various measures under the "**Smart Silver**" programme to help those in need (especially the elderly) to understand and use digital technology products and services, enabling them to use digital technologies effectively and safely, and **fully integrate into the digital society**. Besides, DPO has also launched the **Digital Accessibility Campaign** for promoting the adoption of accessibility design by government departments, private and public organizations on their websites and mobile applications for facilitating persons with disabilities to access online information and services.

Digital inclusion initiatives

“Smart Silver” Information and Communications Technology Outreach Programme for Elders

3. Since 2014, DPO has launched several rounds of the **“Smart Silver” Information and Communications Technology (“ICT”) Outreach Programme for Elders**, under which non-profit-making elderly services organizations were commissioned to make visits to elderly people across the territory and organize a variety of activities for the elderly to experience digital living, encouraging them to use more digital technology. Also, mobile outreach service stations have been set up to proactively introduce commonly used mobile applications to the elderly and answer their questions on using smart phones. In view of the increasingly serious situation of online and mobile phone scams, special efforts have also been made to introduce anti-fraud information and provide safety tips for using smart phones to the elderly.

“Smart Silver” Enriched Information and Communications Technology Training Programme for the Elderly

4. The **“Smart Silver” Enriched ICT Training Programme for the Elderly** (“Training Programme”) was launched in 2019, offering free advanced digital training courses for the elderly with basic knowledge of digital technology. Topics covered include “iAM Smart”, smart healthcare, cyber security and so on. In response to the needs of society and the elderly, more diversified courses have been introduced to the Training Programme since 2024, such as the basic operation of commonly used Mainland mobile applications. The anti-fraud courses will also be updated from time to time to facilitate the elderly to deal with the evolving scam risks. Furthermore, youth volunteers will be arranged to serve as course instructors to facilitate the elderly in using digital technology and promote inter-generational harmony. Upon completion of the programme, the elderly participants can act as instructors to encourage their fellows to acquire technology knowledge and broaden their social circles.

“Smart Silver” Elderly IT Learning Portal

5. DPO launched a web-based learning portal, namely the **“Smart Silver” Elderly IT Learning Portal**, in 2019 to facilitate self-directed online learning of digital technologies by the elderly, anytime and anywhere. The learning modules offered by the portal cover online shopping, electronic payment and electronic food ordering applications, etc., as well as providing an introduction on Mainland mobile applications frequently used by the

elderly, streaming platforms and online banking, etc., through animation and story plots.

Social innovation and cross-sector digital inclusion projects

6. Launched in 2013, the **Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund** (“SIE Fund”) seeks to alleviate poverty and social exclusion in Hong Kong by promoting social innovation and nurturing social entrepreneurship. Among those projects funded under the SIE Fund, a number of them involve **the promotion of digital inclusion or the use of digital technologies to help improve elders’ health or quality of life**, such as providing convenient and affordable rehabilitation programmes for elderly patients with aphasia or dementia through virtual reality technology, and detecting falling motion of the elderly and send alert messages to their family members and carers.

7. The SIE Fund funded the establishment of the Gerontechnology Platform in 2021 to promote the development and application of gerontechnology by way of engagement, cross-sector partnership and collaboration. In addition, the SIE Fund will allocate \$100 million to support non-governmental organizations to take forward the **“Smart Silver” Digital Inclusion Programme for Elders** during 2025-2027. The programme aims to set up community-based help desks in various districts to provide digital technology training and technical support for the elderly.

Community Cooperation Activities

8. DPO works in collaboration with the **District Services and Community Care Teams** (“Care Teams”) to design and develop the learning materials of digital technology suitable for the elderly. The contents of these learning materials cover various digital technology applications in daily life, such as “iAM Smart”, social connectivity, streaming platforms and electronic food ordering. The Administration expects that through the Care Team’s community network and close contact with residents, as well as opportunities to reach out to the elderly in ordinary district work, practical information, including anti-fraud messages, can be disseminated to the elderly more effectively and assist them in making good use of digital technology.

Digital Accessibility Campaign

9. On the promotion of digital accessibility, a total of about 650 government websites have already met the Level AA standard of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.0 promulgated by the World

Wide Web Consortium,¹ and complied with the accessibility requirements for making websites accessible to persons with disabilities. All of some 80 government mobile applications have also adopted accessibility design. Besides, in view of the ageing society, the Administration has **introduced more elderly-specific design requirements** for the **accessibility design of websites and mobile applications**, and published the “Elderly-friendly Website/Mobile Application Design Guide” in 2023 for the reference of government departments and industries. At the same time, the Administration supports the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited in regularly organizing the Digital Accessibility Recognition Scheme (“the Recognition Scheme”), so as to encourage public and private organizations to adopt accessible designs on their websites and mobile applications.

Major views and concerns expressed by Members

10. Members’ major views and concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Practicality of digital technology training

11. Members were of the view that the Administration should **enhance the practicality and personalization of the digital technology training** under the “Smart Silver” programme. Members suggested that the elderly should be introduced to one or two essential applications first, and then gradually introduced to other digital knowledge. The Administration advised that enhancements had been made to the contents of the relevant courses in 2023 to enhance their practicality, including the introduction of mobile applications frequently used in the Mainland. It had also collaborated with the Hong Kong Police Force and the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre to incorporate anti-fraud and the latest cybersecurity knowledge into the programme, and to provide information such as fraud detection to the elderly through the mobile outreach service stations and other digital inclusion initiatives. Personalized digital technical support would also be provided to the elderly through specific programmes, offering appropriate support suiting their individual needs.

¹ For example, providing textual descriptions for non-textual content, subtitles for video files, sufficient colour contrast and sufficient time to facilitate users in reading content and performing operations, etc.

Community cooperation and promotion

12. Members enquired whether the Administration would **coordinate the efforts** of DPO, other government departments and community organizations **in offering digital training courses**, with a view to making more effective use of resources in providing digital technology training of various kinds for the elderly. Members suggested that the Administration should **capitalize on the resources from the industry and professional organizations**, and indicated that the industry would be willing to form volunteer teams and provide relevant assistance to promote social inclusion. Members also suggested that funding should be provided to non-profit-making organizations for organizing digital inclusion activities, and venues should be provided in various districts for **setting up “cyber cafes for the elderly”** to provide equipment such as computers or smart phones to promote technological knowledge among the elderly.

13. The Administration advised that there had been close collaboration between various government departments and community organizations to provide the elderly with general knowledge on various digital technologies and disseminate relevant information to the elderly through the Care Teams. In addition, the Administration also worked with various industry organizations, such as the Hong Kong Computer Society and the Smart City Consortium, and invited their members to serve as guest trainers for the training programmes. Members suggested that the Administration should study **the establishment of gerontechnology service teams and commissioners across the territory** and complement the work of the Care Teams, so as to reach out to the community to assist hidden elders in choosing, purchasing/renting and applying gerontechnology products.

Promoting digital accessibility

14. Members expressed concern about the measures taken by the Administration to **support ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities in the use of technology**, and suggested that funding support should be provided for community organizations to set up accessible websites in compliance with the international standards. Members also suggested that **artificial intelligence technology should be used to provide accessible public services** to bridge the digital divide. The Administration advised that it would promote the adoption of accessibility and elderly-specific design in websites by both the public and private sectors on various fronts, including providing free assessment and advisory services to all participating organizations under the Recognition Scheme, and hosting briefing sessions for different sectors of the community to promote the concepts and technical requirements of digital accessibility design.

Effectiveness of digital inclusion initiatives

15. Members noted that according to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department (“C&SD”), the rate of persons aged 65 and over having used the Internet in 2023 was 84%, and the Administration expected that the rate could reach 87% by 2025. Members commented that **a more aggressive target should be set for increasing the Internet usage rate of the elderly**. The Administration advised that it would strive to promote digital inclusion by, for example, increasing the number of mobile outreach service stations and stepping up collaborative efforts with the Care Teams and industry organizations, with a view to further boosting the Internet usage rate among the elderly.

16. Questions were raised as to whether **indicators reflecting the competence of the elderly in using digital technology would be developed** with reference to the experience of the Mainland or overseas places. Members suggested that effective performance indicators and tools for reviewing the utilization of various digital inclusion initiatives should be developed, with a view to accurately assessing the performance of the community organizations providing the services, the effectiveness of the initiatives, the competence of the elderly in using the online services after training, and whether the quality of life could be improved through the use of technology. In response, the Administration advised that a follow-up survey would be conducted following the completion of a training programme. The Administration, together with C&SD, would also study the inclusion of indicators that could reflect the elderly’s capability in using digital technology in the existing survey, so as to examine the effectiveness of the relevant work.

Questions raised at Council meetings

17. Members have raised questions in respect of the Administration’s work on promoting digital inclusion at Council meetings. The relevant hyperlinks are in the **Appendix**.

Latest development

18. The Administration will report to the Panel on 14 April 2025 on the Government’s work progress of promoting digital inclusion.

Relevant papers

19. A list of relevant papers is set out in the [Appendix](#).

Council Business Divisions
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 April 2025

Promoting digital inclusion

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting	10 July 2023	Agenda Item III: Digital inclusion Minutes of meeting Follow-up paper
	3 June 2024	Agenda Item III: Promoting digital inclusion Minutes of meeting

Council meeting	Paper
23 November 2022	Question 5 : Encouraging the application of gerontechnology among the elderly
19 April 2023	Question 3 : Measures to improve social isolation among the elderly
8 November 2023	Members' motion : Accelerating the construction of community facilities for a smart city and bridging the digital divide Progress report
3 July 2024	Question 20 : Promoting the application of gerontechnology