

Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong

Disability Awareness: A Baseline Study in the Property Management Sector

Press Conference

Press Release

CityU research reveals inadequate disability awareness in property management industry

To study the current state of provision of disability awareness training to employees and levels of disability awareness within the property management industry in Hong Kong, the Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong carried out a baseline study. The research project was funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission under its Funding Programme of Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2013/14. In the period between May and December 2014, two questionnaire surveys were conducted, with responses from 26 property management companies and 342 property management practitioners. Besides, four in-depth interviews were conducted, two with senior managers of property management companies and two with property management practitioners. Research findings reveal that it is a general consensus within the industry that barrier-free or inclusive built environment is important to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and that property or facility management is important to the protection of the interests of PWDs. Yet, some misconceptions about disability still prevail in the industry. Besides, in their routine property management tasks, practitioners seldom consider the interests of PWDs. This situation reflects the low level of disability awareness of the property management industry in Hong Kong. To make the built environment in the city to be more inclusive, there is a need for further tailored actions

Disability Awareness: Definition and Significance

In this study, “disability awareness” is defined as having knowledge or well informed about the concepts of disabilities, and the special needs of PWDs. A large volume of literature discusses the importance of disability awareness. In general, disability awareness can help dispel negative societal attitudes towards and beliefs about PWDs, enhancing acceptance of the PWDs by the community. It can also increase the socialization experienced by the PWDs and improvement of their life quality.

Key Findings of the Research

The key findings of the research are as follows:

- (1) Since April 2011, only 31% of the companies have provided training to the employees to enhance their awareness and knowledge of the disabilities and only 23% of the practitioners participated in such training activities.
- (2) Only 12% of the companies formulated policies for conforming the liabilities as a management agent of a premise laid down in the DDO. Only 23% of the companies

formulated related guidelines. Yet, about half of the practitioners were not sure if their companies had related policy or guideline.

- (3) Less than 10% of the companies had designated staff for coordinating accessibility issues in the developments or properties under their management.
- (4) More established property management companies possessed resources and capacity to ensure their employees to observe the interests of PWDs in their property management tasks.
- (5) 72% of the practitioners recognized the importance of barrier-free built environment to PWDs. Besides, 62% of the practitioners agreed on the importance of facility management to ensure that a barrier-free built environment.
- (6) Over 70% of the practitioners did not consider: providing instant sign language interpretation when holding events; producing property guides, booklets and promotional leaflets with large-print and braille versions; and providing accessible versions to facilitate the browsing by persons with different types of disabilities when setting up a property website and formulating the contingency plans.
- (7) Less than a quarter of the respondents thought that they had adequate awareness, knowledge and ability to deal with the needs of PWDs in their routine property management tasks.
- (8) Education level, personal experience of disabilities, regular contact with PWDs and attendance to disability-related training were found to be significant determinants in enhancing their level of disability awareness.

Recommendations

With reference to the research findings, a number of recommendations are made:

- (1) To develop guidebooks or codes of practice for inclusive property management;
- (2) To incorporate elements of equal opportunities and barrier-free built environment in property and facility management-related programmes at higher education level, and to promote disability awareness through continuing professional development;
- (3) To provide subsidies and resources for supporting disability awareness training and development of training kits;
- (4) To introduce customer care charter for the PWDs in the industry; and
- (5) To adopt strategy of sustainable procurement by the government and private landlords when outsourcing property management services, including promotion of disability-inclusion as a criterion in tender evaluation.

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