

EO Files (November 2011)

“THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET - Reflections in Brief”

Towards Equal Opportunities

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) wins the Directors of the Year Award from the Hong Kong Institute of Directors in recognition of its excellence in corporate governance and the professionalism of its Board of Directors, which has contributed to the gradual improvement in equal opportunities in everyday life.

2011 marks the 15th Anniversary of the EOC. Guided and governed by a full-time Chairperson and 16 appointed Members, the EOC offers redress to victims of discrimination through conciliation and legal assistance, promotes awareness and the intrinsic values of equality, and provides training and advisory service to those in need.

Good Corporate Governance

Selection criteria for the Directors of the Year Awards included the Board's diversity in composition, skill mix and competencies; effectiveness in strategic corporate functions; managing compliance and accountability; managing change, risk and succession; business ethics and effectiveness of board committees; and other outstanding achievements. Winners of this Award need to demonstrate its success and effectiveness in each of these areas, through concerted efforts of their Board. The EOC Board is constituted by Members with diverse but relevant backgrounds and expertise, including representatives of women's groups, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, employment

groups, providers of social services, legal and accounting professionals, academics, and the community at large. The Board's demonstration of professionalism, commitment and efficiency in the past year has won the Selection Panel's choice. The Commission is proud of it and pledges to carry on the success to new heights in the term ahead.

Enforcing Compliance

The Commission handled 13,000 enquiries, 1,119 complaints and 59 applications for legal assistance in 2010/11. Some HK\$5.5 million of monetary compensation was secured in the settlement through conciliation and legal assistance last year.

Effecting Positive Change

The Commission's Formal Investigation Report on Accessibility in Publicly Accessible Premises was made public in June 2010. The report targeted at public premises owned or managed by the Housing Authority, Hong Kong Housing Society, The Link Management Ltd., and various Government departments, in the hope that it would raise public awareness and put pressure on the public sector owners/managers to take the lead in territory wide improvements. The outcome is positive: the Government has pledged to make all public premises and facilities accessible through a HK\$1.3 billion retrofitting programme as well as appointing designated Access Coordinators and Managers to ensure improved management. The Link has similarly pledged an improvement program for its malls and facilities, costing no less than HK\$200 million. The effort marks a major policy breakthrough for hundreds of thousands of those in need. It also brings about a positive change in social attitude towards the needs of persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Cruising Ahead

Being forward-looking, the EOC is taking on a number of other initiatives to promote equal opportunities for all. With the successful completion and well-received publication of the revised Code of Practice on Employment under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance this summer, the Commission has started work on its next priority: revision to the Code of Practice on Employment under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. This piece of work is important because most complaints under these two Ordinances are related to employment.

Inclusive education is also among the main concerns of the EOC, with equal opportunities for ethnic minority children topping the list. The EOC published a report on the subject this summer in which it was proposed that the Education Bureau should substantially enhance Chinese Language support from the pre-primary level onwards, and provide an alternative Chinese qualification and assessment benchmark which would be attainable by most.

The EOC has also made a strong pitch to advocate for the establishment of a dedicated Equal Opportunities Tribunal. The aim of the Tribunal is to provide a user-friendly and more efficient adjudication system to deal with discrimination cases promptly.

Proud to be an Awardee

The Commission is proud to receive the Directors of the Year Award. We are thankful to the Hong Kong Institute of Directors for its just recognition. We will continue to work relentlessly to build a genuinely inclusive society.



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