Study on Effective Strategies to Facilitate School-to-work Transition of Young Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong

5 June 2023

Objectives of the study

(a) To give an overview of the local and overseas policies and approaches adopted to facilitate persons with disabilities' access to post-secondary education and school-to-work transition as well as their outcomes of post-secondary education (e.g., rates of completion) and labour market outcomes (e.g., duration of employment, wage, training and promotion opportunities);
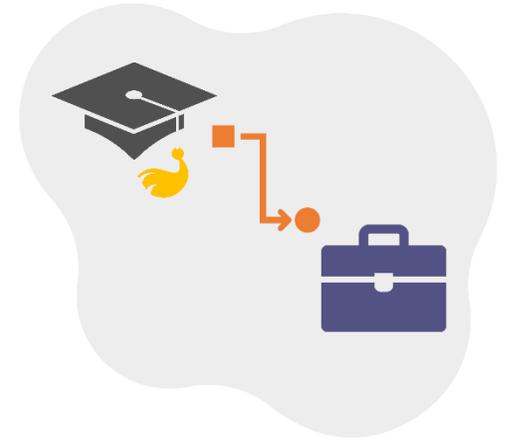
(b) To gauge the views from young persons with disabilities (PWDs) and their parents, teachers/ school administrators, and employers concerning education and employment of PWDs;

(c) To examine the educational and occupational aspirations of young PWDs and the strategies they adopt to achieve their academic and career goals and the effectiveness of these strategies;
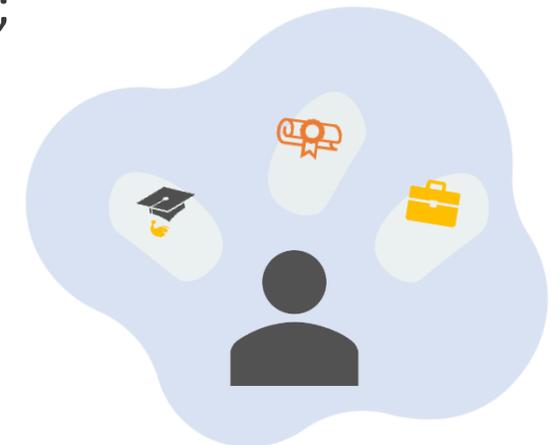
Objectives of the study

(d) To investigate the experiences of young PWDs in transitioning to post-secondary education and to the labour market;
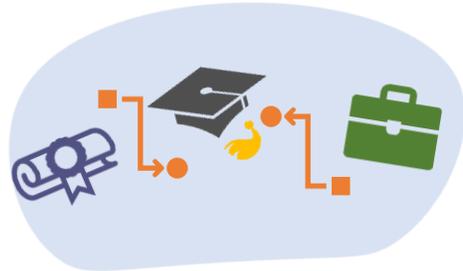
(e) To identify the mechanisms facilitating successful transitions as well as the obstacles inhibiting these transitions;

(f) To evaluate the effectiveness of subsidies, allowances, and related employment support services provided by Government departments/ bureaux and other stakeholders in facilitating labour market integration of young PWDs; and

(g) To make concrete policy recommendations on institutional support to facilitate young PWDs' transition to post-secondary education and to the labour market.

Background

Overview of the school-to-work transition pathways
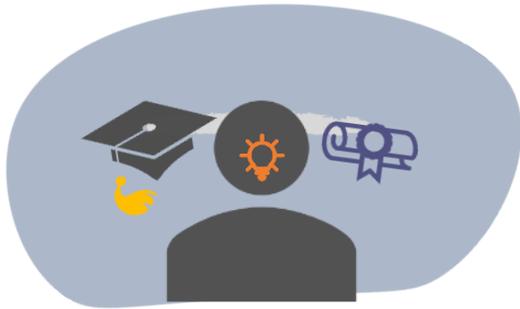
Pathway 1

From secondary to post-secondary education

Pathway 2

From secondary education to work

Pathway 3

From post-secondary education to work

Conceptual framework

Micro-level

e.g. services for individuals

Mezzo-level

e.g. schools and enterprises

Macro-level

e.g. laws and policies

Background

Literature research

In-depth interviews

Focus group interviews

Surveys

40 Young PWDs

30 Interviews were conducted from January to October 2020 and #10 interviews were conducted in September and October 2021.

73 Stakeholders

Focus groups were conducted from January to October 2020.

1 421 Surveys

Questionnaire surveys were conducted from April 2021 to October 2021.

3 Social worker groups 23 persons

2 Employers groups 9 persons

2 Parent groups 15 persons

2 Teacher groups 12 persons

2 Employees groups 14 persons

673 Young PWDs	193 Parents/ Carers	155 Teachers/ Instructors	111 Social workers/ Counsellors/ Social service practitioners	161 Employers	128 Employees

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Background

Profile of Young PWDs Participating in Interviews

40 **Young PWDs**
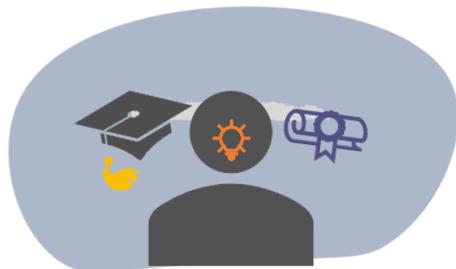
19
Students

13
Young people with secondary educational attainment

8
Young people with post-secondary educational attainment

Nature of Disability*
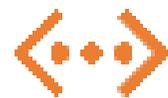
18 (45%)
Visible Disability

22 (55%)
Invisible Disability

A person's disability visibility is determined by self-identification.

Type of Disability

Multiple disabilities	8 (20%)
Visual Impairment	6 (15%)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	5 (12.5%)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	3 (7.5%)
Depression /Psychosis	3 (7.5%)
Hearing Impairment	3 (7.5%)
Intellectual Disability	3 (7.5%)
Physical Disability	3 (7.5%)
Bi-polar Disorder	2 (5%)
Chronic Illness	2 (5%)
Down Syndrome	1 (2.5%)
Spinal Muscular Atrophy	1 (2.5%)

Background

Profile of Young PWDs Participating in Survey

673 Young PWDs
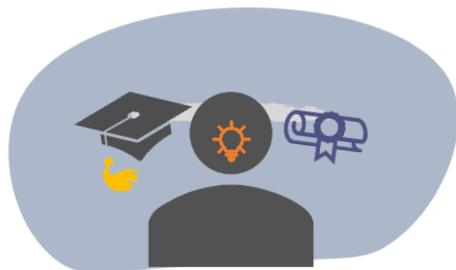
304 Students

223 Young people with secondary educational attainment

146 Young people with post-secondary educational attainment

Nature of Disability*

204 (30%) Visible Disability

469 (70%) Invisible Disability

A person's disability visibility is determined by self-identification.

Type of Disability

Multiple disabilities	199 (29.6%)
Depression /Psychosis	127 (18.9%)
Specific Learning Difficulties	63 (9.4%)
Physical Disability	62 (9.2%)
Hearing Impairment	55 (8.2%)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	48 (7.1%)
ADHD	44 (6.5%)
Intellectual Disability	43 (6.4%)
Visual Impairment	23 (3.4%)
Chronic Illness	9 (1.3%)

Interviews with Young PWDs
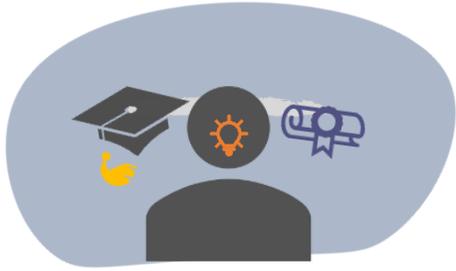
Pathway 1

- Difficulties in concentration
- Inconveniences encountered in the learning process
- Difficulties in interacting with peers at school
- Issues with disability disclosure
- Rigid school arrangements

Pathway 2

- Limitation due to impairments
- Low self confidence
- Limited job options

Pathway 3

- Lack of barrier-free access facilities
- Lack of acceptance of PWDs

Interviews with Young PWDs

Inconveniences encountered in the learning process:

"When [professors] speak without getting close to the microphone, I can hear [something] but it's very hard for me to hear [clearly what exactly they say]. When listening for a long time, I feel very exhausted. I lose focus. Sometimes my ears hurt."

[University student with physical disability and hearing impairment, aged 28, F, Interviewee #5]

Issues with disability disclosure:

"Perhaps my academic performance at university is not bad, so some of my classmates who know my situation [my disability] said: Well, your disability is not serious, and it is hard for others to notice it. It sounded like they were saying that I wanted [use my disability] to take advantage [of my disability]."

[University student with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, aged 21, F, Interviewee #30]

Interviews with Young PWDs

Lack of barrier-free access facilities:

"I encountered difficulty when using the toilet. Although an accessible toilet was available, there was no table inside for me to change my diaper. I did not urinate for a few hours and only went to the toilet when I returned home."

[University student with muscular dystrophy and physical disability, aged 23, F, Interviewee #31]

Lack of acceptance of PWDs:

"Once or twice, I didn't [explicitly declare] that I was a PWD and then the company...asked me to attend the interview. Of course, I said yes. Right after that they asked about my situation...whether there is anything they needed to pay special attention to, and then I said I am a wheelchair user...and it turned out they asked me to wait until further notice."

[Unemployed young person with physical disability, graduated from secondary school (special), aged 30, M, Interviewee #6]

Interviews with Young PWDs
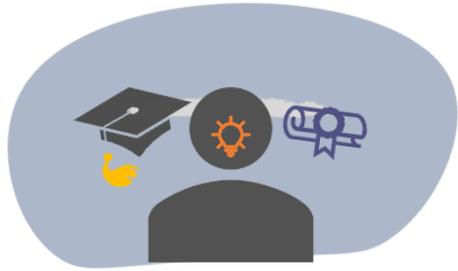
Pathway 1

- Use of information and assistive technologies
- Accommodation at schools

Pathway 2

- Career support services
- Flexible work arrangements
- Support from colleagues

Pathway 3

- Support from family
- Support from peers and friends

Interviews with Young PWDs

Accommodations at schools:

"Each room originally should accommodate two students. My university allowed me, with my helper, to occupy a room. Renovations were made for me, and a transfer crane and shower chair were installed in the room, coupled with the provision of a wheelchair for me to use."

[University student with muscular dystrophy and physical disability, aged 23, F, Interviewee #31]

"I received special treatment. Usually, my university requires students to attend class according to their own class schedule. But as I need to attend medical follow-ups, the university exercises flexibility in my case, allowing me to attend other available class time slots, and I only need to inform the professor about my request just before the session."

[University student with depression, aged 23, M, Interviewee #12]

Focus group interviews with non-PWDs stakeholders

- Learning as a frustrating experience for young PWDs
- Negative effects of integrated education
- Misplace of students with disabilities and low learning abilities in mainstream schools
- Interpersonal difficulties

- Young PWDs' difficulties in job hunting
- Obtaining limited support from employment support services
- Difficulty in meeting work requirements in the job market
- Conflicts with colleagues or employers in the workplace
- Low self-confidence
- Parents' overprotective attitude
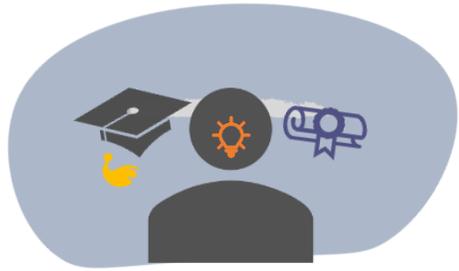
Pathway 1

Pathway 2

Pathway 3

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Focus group interviews with non-PWDs stakeholders

Difficulties in job hunting:

"Discrimination happens everywhere. Even some mainstream people are being discriminated against, not to mention persons with disabilities."

[Employer in the IT industry, M, Participant #69]
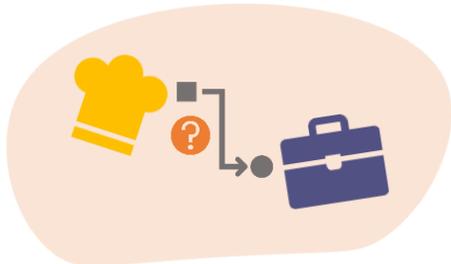
"We're working in the catering sector. I think it is quite hard for us to hire PWDs to work in restaurants. During the off-peak hours, there are not many customers. But during peak hours, we're so busy. We can't even take care of ourselves, as we need to respond to customers quickly. How can we have extra manpower to take care of colleagues with disabilities? So, I am hesitant to hire PWDs."

[Employer of catering sector, M, Participant #66]

"From my experience, young PWDs cannot successfully integrate into society. For example, if a young person with Down syndrome applied for a job and disclosed his or her condition on the CV, I think the employer would not give a chance to employ that candidate, let alone a chance for an interview."

[Father of a son with autism and mild intellectual disorder, Participant #6)

Focus group interviews with non-PWDs stakeholders

Negative effects of integrated education:

"Students at mainstream schools may receive fewer accommodations and are often treated like typical students. They need to compete with normal students."

[Teacher at a mainstream school, M, Participant #22]

Parents' overprotective attitude:

"Some students come from a wealthy family. Their parents do not need them to work. So, those young PWDs do not need to make a living. This overprotective behaviour means young PWDs have low motivation to work."

[Instructor at a skills training centre, F, Participant #17]

Other Key Themes
Experiences of highly educated PWDs

- Young PWDs who previously attended special schools faced more challenges at universities as intensive support was no longer available.

- Inconveniences were caused by lack of accommodations provided by universities.
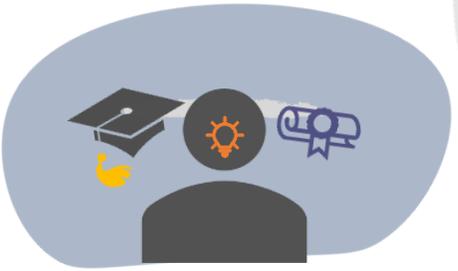
Pathway 1b

- Higher educational attainment did not necessarily lead to labour market success of young PWDs.

- Highly educated PWDs tended to have a higher level of career aspirations.

- Many employers still focused on their disabilities rather than abilities.

- Referrals of job positions (by Labour Department and NGOs) may not be suitable.

Pathway 3

Other Key Themes
Experiences of highly educated PWDs

An interviewee found that there is a huge difference between special school and post-secondary education, in class size and teachers' attention.

"In the past [attend school in special education settings], there were six students in class. It was easier for teachers to observe the progress of each student. I could ask the teacher individually when I didn't understand what was taught in the class. I now feel uneasy and frustrated, as I now have 50 classmates. It has become a barrier to my learning."

[Tertiary student with cerebral palsy and physical disability, aged 21, F, Interviewee #33]

There is limited sign language vocabulary that can be used for expression in learning.

"Perhaps not many persons with hearing impairment pursue university study. Hence, how can some words be expressed as sign language when they have not appeared previously?"

[Young person working full-time with hearing impairment, graduated from university, aged 30, F, Interviewee #20]
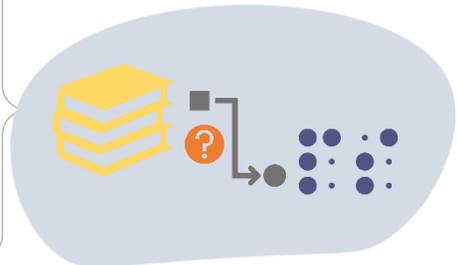
Other Key Themes
Experiences of highly educated PWDs

Though career services targeted at young PWDs with higher education are available, the feedback of young PWDs making a transition from higher education to work does not seem good.
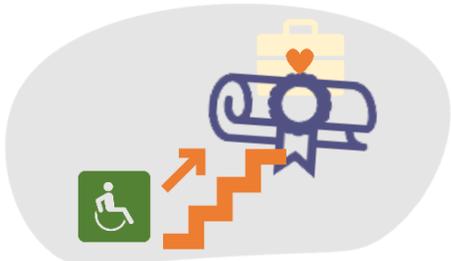
"I think the social positioning of CareER [an NGO] is OK, but what seems to be the problem is all the job positions they offered are from top companies. Some young PWDs may not meet their conditions [standards]… yet the jobs that the Labour Department [Selective Placement Scheme] offers are not really viable options, as they are jobs that pay much lower than the market wage."

[Unemployed young person with chronic illness, finished a master's degree, aged 25, M, Interviewee #2]

Other Key Themes
Young persons with visible and invisible disabilities

- Young persons with physical disabilities and visual impairments often reported inconveniences and problems in daily life due to their disability.

- As some companies hired young PWDs to fulfil corporate social responsibility, they had a tendency to be more willing to hire people with visible disabilities.

- Those with visible disabilities in general did not report relationship problems with their peers (without disabilities) at schools.

With visible disabilities

- Owing to the effect of medication, difficulty in concentration was a common problem for young persons with invisible disabilities.

- Interviewees with depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder and psychosis often encountered interpersonal difficulties with peers without disabilities.

- Low self-confidence may have a more negative impact on those with invisible disabilities such as mental and emotional impairment and ADHD.

With invisible disabilities

Other Key Themes
Young persons with visible and invisible disabilities

Interpersonal difficulties encountered by young persons with invisible disabilities :

'I need to do group projects with them. I was the last student to be included in a project group as usual. I could not keep up with the school curriculum.'

[Young person working full-time with hearing impairment, graduated from skills training centre, aged 30, F, Interviewee #21]
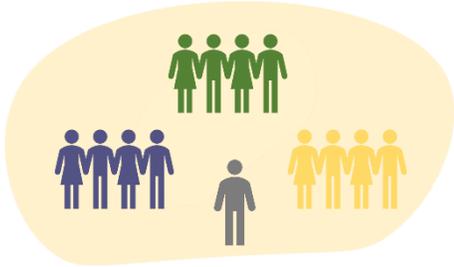
Employers tend to hire young persons with visible disabilities:

'Some companies hire young PWDs to fulfil corporate social responsibility. They have a general tendency to be more willing to hire people with physical disabilities. Those with invisible disabilities have difficulty in securing a job.'

[Social worker at an NGO, M, Participant #36]

Other Key Themes
Young PWDs with experiences of long-term unemployment

Characteristics

- Young PWDs with experiences of long-term unemployment tended to have a lower level of educational attainment.

- They tended to have significant limitations caused by their impairments.

Experiences

- Having a disability coupled with a low level of educational attainment made it even harder to access the labour market.

- They were more vulnerable and more affected by economic downturn. Many of them lost their jobs (e.g., restaurants assistants, library assistants) because of the social movement and coronavirus outbreak.

- They largely relied on NGOs to make job referrals for them.
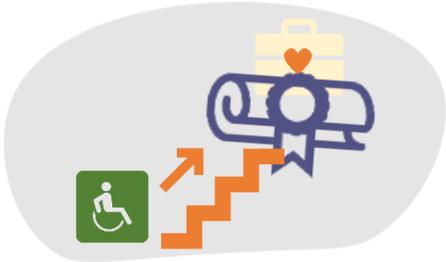
Survey with Young PWDs

Pathway 1

Pathway 1a
Secondary schooling
Measured by Confidence and Difficulty

Pathway 1a to 1b Transitions
From secondary to post-secondary education
Measured by Career Decision Self-Efficacy

Pathway 1b
Post-secondary schooling
Measured by Confidence and Difficulty

Facilitating factor(s)

Pathway 1a:
1. Legal support under the DDO protection
2. Support from teachers/ instructors

Pathway 1a to 1b Transitions:
1. Support from peers
2. Support from teachers/ instructors
3. Support from schools

Pathway 1b:
1. Support from teachers/ instructors
2. Legal support under the DDO protection
3. Support from schools

Hindering factor(s)

Pathway 1a:
1. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection
2. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs
3. Severity of disability perceived by young PWDs

Pathway 1a to 1b Transitions:
(No statistically significant hindering factor was identified.)

Pathway 1b:
1. Severity of disability perceived by young PWDs
2. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs
3. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection

Results from regression analyses (factors ranked by importance)

Survey with Young PWDs

Pathway 2

	Pathway 1a to 2 Transitions From secondary education to work a) Life and Career Planning *Measured by Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CSDE)*	**Pathway 1a to 2 Transitions** From secondary education to work b) Job seeking *Measured by Job Search Self-Efficacy (JSSE)*	**Pathway 2** Completed secondary education and in the labour market *Measured by Employment Values (EV) and Fears of Employment (FE)*
Facilitating factor(s)	1 Support from peers 2 Support from teachers/instructors 3 Support from schools	1 Support from peers 2 Support from schools 3 Support from teachers/instructors	1 Support from schools 2 Visible disability identity
Hindering factor(s)	(No statistically significant hindering factor was identified.)	1 Severity of disability perceived by young PWDs	1 Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs 2 Severity of disability perceived by young PWDs

Results from regression analyses (factors ranked by importance)

Survey with Young PWDs

Pathway 3

Pathway 1b to 3 Transitions
From post-secondary education to work
a) Life and Career Planning
Measured by Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CSDE)

Pathway 1b to 3 Transitions
From post-secondary education to work
b) Job seeking
Measured by Job Search Self-Efficacy (JSSE)

Pathway 3
Completed secondary education and in the labour market
Measured by Employment Values (EV) and Fears of Employment (FE)

Facilitating factor(s)

1. Support from teachers/ instructors
2. Support from schools
3. Support from peers
4. Support from social organisations
5. Awareness of their own disability identity

1. Support from schools
2. Support from peers
3. Support from social organisations
4. Support from parents/carers

(No statistically significant facilitating factor was identified.)

Hindering factor(s)

1. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection

1. Severity of disability perceived by young PWDs
2. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection

1. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs

Results from regression analyses (factors ranked by importance)

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Survey with non-PWDs stakeholders

Facilitating factor(s)

Hindering factor(s)

Parents/ Carers

Pathway 1
1. Legal support under the DDO
2. Support from peers
3. Special education settings

Pathways 2 & 3
(No statistically significant facilitating factor was identified.)

Pathway 1
1. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection

Pathways 2 & 3
1. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs

Teachers/ Instructors

Pathway 1
1. Legal support under the DDO
2. Teaching and learning arrangements at schools

Pathways 2 & 3
1. Support from social organisations

Pathway 1
1. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection

Pathways 2 & 3
1. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs

Social workers/ Counsellors/ Social Service practitioners

Pathway 1
1. Legal support under the DDO

Pathways 2 & 3
1. Support from social organisations

Pathway 1
1. Perceived hindrance under the DDO protection
2. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs

Pathways 2 & 3
1. Self-stigma perceived by young PWDs
2. Support from schools
3. Support from social organisations

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Survey with non-PWDs stakeholders

Employers

**85.1%** were willing to hire persons with disabilities with post-secondary qualifications.

55.3% were concerned about the cost of barrier-free facilities/accommodation.

52.2% feared costs associated with additional training required for employees with disabilities and not being able to discipline employees with disabilities because of potential lawsuits.

Employees

More than **80%** of the employees expressed that they were willing to work with persons with disabilities.

Employees from large enterprises showered a higher level of willingness to work with PWDs than were those from small and medium enterprises.

72.7% of the employees believed that it is more difficult for employers to terminate the employment of employee(s) with disabilities than of employee(s) without disabilities, given unsatisfactory job performance.

Employees from large enterprises were more likely to show awareness of the use of language when communicating with colleagues with disabilities to avoid offending them than were those from small and medium enterprises.

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Recommendations

Shifting from welfare- to rights-based paradigm

Policy Direction 1

Policy Direction 2

Policy Direction 3

② Promoting acceptance of diversity in the community:

- Promote inclusiveness in language and inclusive programs in communities
- Promote diversity and inclusion in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools
- Nurture inclusion values in extra-curricular activities and Business-School Partnership Program

① Enhancing public awareness of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance:

- Promote young PWDs' legal rights under the DDO
- Introduce a positive duty for reasonable accommodation
- Improve accessibility through incentive schemes and financial support

Recommendations

Policy Direction 1
Policy Direction 2
Policy Direction 3
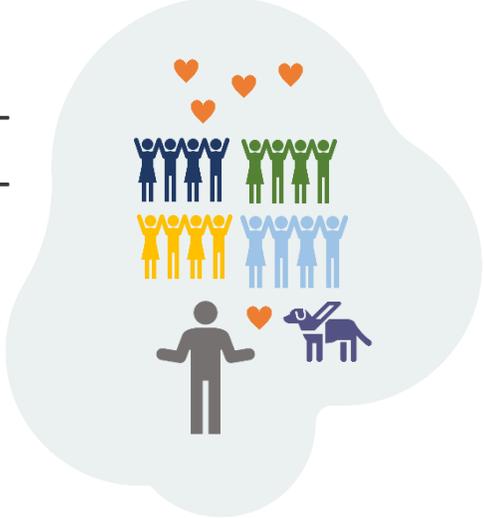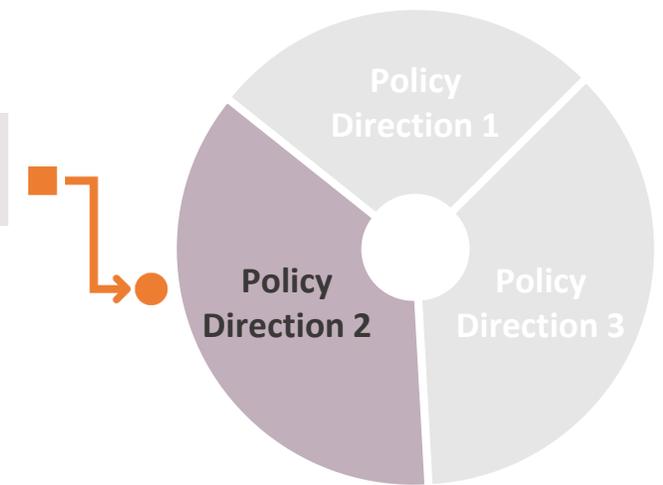
3 **Strengthening support systems in mainstream secondary schools:**

- Provide Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) with transition support services
- Stabilise the provision of specialists' support at school
- Collaborate between mainstream schools, special schools, and NGOs

4 **Promoting more diversified school-to-work transition pathways for young PWDs:**

- Enrich the industries and the job areas covered in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Mechanism under the Qualifications Framework (QF)
- Collaborate with NGOs and reputable industry associations for promotion of RPL

5 **Engaging the business sector in workplace inclusion:**

- Engage enterprises in NGO's interventions and strengthen existing Government's programmes for promoting workplace inclusion
- Request listed companies to disclose their workplace-inclusive efforts in Environmental, Social, and Governance reports

Policy Direction 1

Policy Direction 2

Policy Direction 3
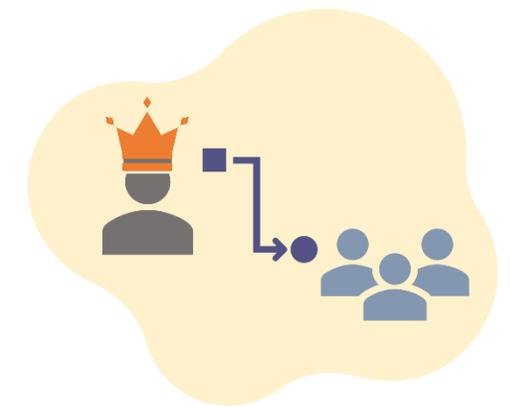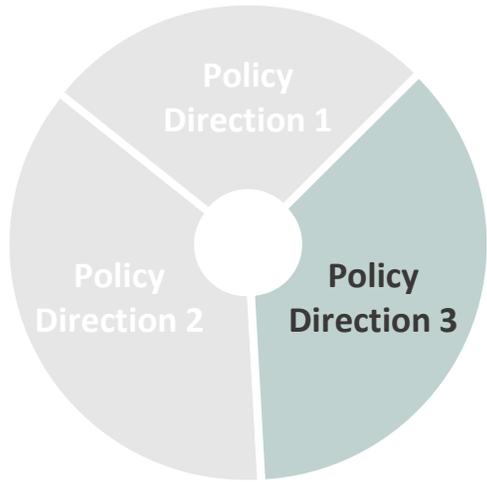
Enhancing multiple-level interventions

6 **Strengthening support for post-secondary students with disabilities:**

- Re-position UGC's special grant for supporting students with disabilities
- Strengthen academic advisor system for engaging the teachers/instructors
- SEN support unit to engage students to peer support/ambassador programmes
- Career support units of post-secondary institutions to focus on internship opportunities, work-integrated education, etc.
- NGOs to focus on extensive support for job seeking of young PWDs
- Labour Department to engage the business sector in workplace inclusion and promoting workplace accessibility

Policy Direction 1

Policy Direction 2

Policy Direction 3
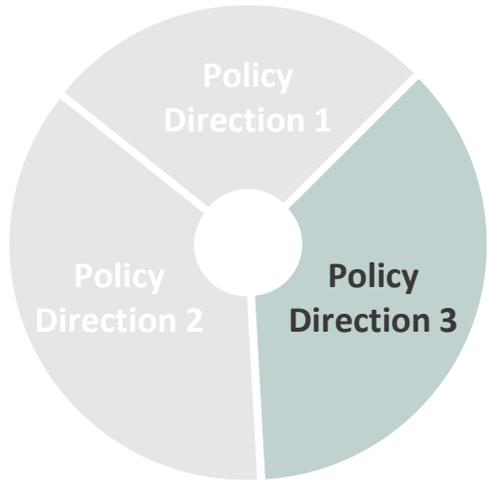
Enhancing multiple-level interventions

7 **Enhancing support for persons with invisible disabilities:**

- Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to coordinate with school counselling team, Student Support Team and NGOs in fostering understanding of PWDs
- Mandate teachers to attend training on students with special educational needs (SEN)
- Collaborate between SEN Support Unit, teachers/instructors and students, with peer support/ambassador programmes to enhance understanding of PWDs in UGC-funded universities
- Provide training to school teachers and workplace staff to enhance awareness of less visible needs

8 **Engaging parents/carers of young PWDs in the school-to-work transition process:**

- Use a family-centered approach
- Help parents understand young PWDs' interests and abilities and develop realistic goals