

Social Welfare Department
Information Note on the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities

1. Background and Objectives

The policy objective of the Government in assisting persons with disabilities to attain employment is to ensure that they have equal access to participation in productive and gainful employment in the open market. To support the employment of persons with disabilities, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has launched the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities (SPED) which provides employers of persons with disabilities with a one-off subsidy up to \$20,000 in respect of each employee with disabilities for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications. The SPED has been further enhanced since April 2014, including raising the maximum support level of \$40,000 for procurement of a single assistive device and its essential accessories. The SPED is to facilitate employees with disabilities in discharging their duties at the workplace and to enhance their work efficiency. In 2019, a comprehensive review on enhancing the support to employees with disabilities and their employers was conducted so as to better suit their needs.

2. Administration of the SPED

2.1 An Assessment Committee (the Committee) has been set up under the SPED. The Committee consists of members from the fields of information technology, rehabilitation engineering (e.g. occupational therapist), rehabilitation, social welfare, etc. who have expert knowledge of the special needs of persons with disabilities and their need for assistive devices and/or workplace modifications.

2.2 The Committee shall vet the applications with reference to the assessments and recommendations made by Po Leung Kuk which is commissioned by SWD to administer the SPED (i.e. the SPED Administrator). The decision of the Committee on each application shall be final.

3. Eligibility for Application

3.1 Applicants under the SPED must be employers of persons with disabilities.

The categories of disability ^{Note 1} are listed below -

- (a) Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder;
- (b) Autism;
- (c) Hearing impairment;
- (d) Intellectual disability;
- (e) Physical disability;
- (f) Mental illness;
- (g) Specific learning difficulties;
- (h) Speech impairment;
- (i) Visceral disability; and
- (j) Visual impairment.

3.2 Applicants must be nominated and referred by the following referring organisations -

- (a) non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating SWD-subsided vocational rehabilitation services;
- (b) NGOs running training courses for persons with disabilities or persons recovering from work injuries with the funding support of the Employees Retraining Board;
- (c) the Selective Placement Division of the Labour Department;
- (d) the Vocational Training Council; or
- (e) the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk).

3.3 Applicants without any connection with the potential referring organisations as listed in paragraph 3.2(a) to (d) above may contact the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk) at 3980 9677 for assistance and necessary arrangement.

4. Referring Organisations

Referring organisations can assist to -

- (a) make referrals under the SPED;
- (b) provide assistance and advice for employers on their applications under the SPED;
- (c) make recommendations on the assistive devices to be procured and/or workplace modification works to be carried out.

^{Note 1} The categories are set out in the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan 2005-2007.

5. Application Procedures

- 5.1 Applications are received all year round. Applications from employers should be made on the specified application form (Annex 1), together with quotations from at least two suppliers for each item. The completed application forms for the SPED (in duplicate) should be sent by hand / by mail to the Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services Branch of SWD at Room 503, 5/F., West Coast International Building, 290-296 Un Chau Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon via the referring organisation.
- 5.2 Applicants may consult the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk) for cases requiring special arrangement.
- 5.3 Applicants are required to submit one application form for one beneficiary, i.e. an employee with disabilities. No application fee is required and each applicant may submit more than one application.

6. Level of Subsidy

- 6.1 The Committee shall consider the requested items on a case-by-case basis having regard to the information provided by the applicant and the referring organisation, as well as the assessment provided by the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk).
- 6.2 Only necessary device(s) and/or works will be approved for each case. A list of examples of devices and/or works is at Annex 2 for reference. The Committee shall consider the quotations provided and the specific requirements of the devices and/or works in supporting the amount of subsidy. The approved amount, capped at a maximum support level of \$40,000 for each employee with disabilities, may be less than what an applicant employer has requested. Should the amount eventually required for the procurement of assistive device/modification works exceeded the approved amount, the applicant employers should pay for the balance with their own resources.
- 6.3 The SPED does not cover devices or equipment which is not specifically related to the discharge of employment duties or which is a personal or

therapeutic item used by the employee with disabilities for daily living or therapy, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids and glasses, etc. Modification works for meeting statutory requirements will not be covered by the SPED.

6.4 Assistive devices may be provided in kind by the SPED subject to availability of the devices with same specification as requested.

7. SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk)

7.1 Following receipt of an application, the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk) shall prepare an assessment report by means of site visit and/or interview(s) with the applicant and the employee with disabilities to consider the appropriateness of the proposed assistive devices and/or modification works in facilitating the employee with disabilities to carry out duties at the workplace and to enhance the work efficiency. The assessment report on the application shall be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

7.2 Following the approval of the subsidy, the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk) shall monitor the use of subsidy through inspection visit(s) at the workplace. Po Leung Kuk shall prepare follow-up reports within six months following the approval of the subsidy to assess the effectiveness of the devices procured and/or works carried out.

8. Notification on Approval of Applications

Applicants and referring organisations will be informed of the application results in writing, normally within three months after the deadline for application.

9. Procurement of Assistive Devices and/or Workplace Modifications

9.1 After being notified about the approval of the applications, applicants shall procure the assistive devices and/or carry out the modification works within two months.

9.2 Successful applicants should send the required documents, including original receipt(s), to SWD within one month after the procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications. Payments would be

arranged by reimbursement to the applicants upon their production of valid receipt(s) in Hong Kong currency.

9.3 Successful applicants must comply with the following conditions when seeking reimbursement of the subsidy:

- (a) the original receipt(s) must indicate clearly the procurement of the approved item(s) of assistive device(s) and modification works as stated in the notification letter;
- (b) the date of receipt(s) must not be earlier than the date of approval of the subsidy;
- (c) if the amount spent on the assistive device(s) and/or modification works exceeds the approved amount, applicants have to bear the difference at their own costs;
- (d) costs of repair and maintenance of the assistive device(s) and/or modification works are in general not covered by the SPED;
- (e) if the assistive device is provided in kind to the applicant organisation by the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk), the SPED would pay for the cost of extension of maintenance for the assistive devices once only. However, the repair costs, if incurred, would not be covered;
- (f) if cash rebate or cash coupon is offered for assistive device(s) and/or modification works, it must be stated clearly on the receipt(s). The amount of cash rebate or cash coupon will be taken as a reduction in price when releasing the subsidy; and
- (g) on the condition that the employer was willing to bear the risk of approval not being granted by the SPED, the employer could procure the assistive devices (NOT applicable to modification works) without prior approval of the SPED but must sound out the request to Po Leung Kuk before procurement.

10. Special Provisions

10.1 The subsidy is one-off in nature. In general, an applicant is only eligible for the subsidy once in five years in respect of the same employee with disabilities. For re-application within the five-year period in respect of the same employee with disabilities, the applicant must provide full justifications with supporting document(s), if applicable, for special consideration.

- 10.2 Applicants should put in place reasonable measures to facilitate employees with disabilities to work at the workplaces before the granting of subsidy; and to facilitate priority access by employees with disabilities to the assistive devices and/or the modified workplaces supported by the SPED.
- 10.3 Applicants are required to receive staff of SWD and/or the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk), who would visit the workplace for assessment and inspection of the assistive devices procured and/or modification works carried out.
- 10.4 Successful applicants are allowed to keep the assistive devices purchased under the SPED. As a condition for subsidy, they are required to declare that they will not sell, rent or transfer any of the devices funded by the SPED to other organisations or individuals / employees.
- 10.5 Upon termination of an employment contract with an employee with disabilities within five years from the approval of the subsidy, employers are required to inform SWD and the SPED Administrator (Po Leung Kuk) of their proposal as to how to make use of the assistive devices and/or the modified setting of the workplace to benefit other employees with disabilities. Different scenarios are set out below -
 - (i) If the assistive device is retained by the employers for future employment of employee with disabilities, Po Leung Kuk would check regularly on whether the vacancy has been filled by employee with disabilities to ensure that the assistive devices could be gainfully deployed. Should the employer fail to fill the vacancy with employee with disabilities for a long period of time, say after a year, the assistive device should be returned to Po Leung Kuk; or
 - (ii) If the device is tailor-made for the employee with disabilities and is unlikely to benefit other employees with disabilities, employers shall seek SWD's agreement to the transfer of the device to the employee with disabilities concerned at no cost. Application for such transfer should be made to SWD with full justifications at least one month before the proposed date of transfer; or

(iii) If the duties at the new workplace of the employees with disabilities are assessed to be roughly the same to that of their previous job, the Po Leung Kuk may recommend the ex-employer to transfer the device to the employee with disabilities concerned. Documentary proof, e.g. employment contract, should be provided to the Po Leung Kuk to prove that they have already got a new job or a job offer before they could be considered for taking the assistive devices to their new workplace. The new employers would be asked to indicate that they agree to take over the assistive devices and the Po Leung Kuk would handle the case by means of the fast track mechanism to expedite the transferral process.

10.6 If there are any significant changes to the successful applicants such as office removal, termination of business, etc. within five years from the approval of the subsidy, successful applicants are required to inform SWD and the SPED Administrator at least one month prior to such changes with proposal on the arrangement of the assistive devices and/or the modified setting of the workplace.

10.7 The SPED reserves the right to request the return of the assistive devices shall the assistive devices are no longer be of use by any employees with disabilities.

11. Enquiries

For any enquiries, please contact Po Leung Kuk, the SPED Administrator, by the following means -

Tel.: 3980 9677
E-mail: sped@poleungkuk.org.hk
Fax: 3980 9633

Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services Branch
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