

LCQ18: Promotion of gender equality

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Following is a question by the Hon Emily Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

Regarding the promotion of gender equality, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was granted \$2 million in 2001 to carry out a study on "equal pay for work of equal value" but has not released the report so far, how the authorities have followed up the work in this respect;

(b) as EOC proposed to amend the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in 1999, of the reasons for the authorities not having introduced a bill into this Council to amend the ordinance;

(c) as only two of the 15 non-official members of the Executive Council are females, and there are only two females among the 19 principal officials, of the authorities' measures to increase the proportion of women at the decision-making level of the Government; and

(d) as the authorities have indicated that they intend to raise the existing 25% gender benchmark for the memberships of statutory and advisory bodies (i.e. at least 25% of their members are of either sex) in line with international norms (i.e. between 30% and 35%), of the details of such a plan?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Government was represented on the task force set up to oversee the study on "equal pay for work of equal value" (EPEV) commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Other members of the task force included representatives from the EOC and academics. Members of the task force examined the draft report of the study in 2003 and had divergent views on the methodology adopted

in the study, the interpretation of data and whether the findings of the draft report could support the recommendations made. The EOC considered it necessary to look into the various issues in further detail.

Since then, we have been following up the progress of the study through our regular liaison with the EOC. Due to the complexities of the issues involved, the EOC required more time to examine the respective issues and consider the best way to take the matter forward. The EOC has planned to finalise and release the results of the study within the next three months. Thereafter, the EOC will revise the Code of Practice on Employment and organise training, workshops and seminars etc. to further promote the concept of EPEV and eliminate gender stereotyping.

(b) As regards the EOC's proposal to extend the statutory provisions against sexual harassment to additional areas, we will expand the scope of protection against sexual harassment in educational establishments by extending the definition of sexual harassment in the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO) to cover conduct which renders sexually hostile or intimidating the environment in which she works, studies or undergoes training, or carries out related or incidental activities. We will incorporate the above proposed amendment to the SDO in the Race Discrimination Bill as the latter will also deal with racial harassment in a similar manner.

As regards the other amendments proposed by the EOC, some are technical amendments and the others may have read-across implications on other anti-discrimination ordinances. We will consider the most appropriate way to take forward these proposed amendments after the enactment of the Race Discrimination Bill.

(c) When making nomination for appointment as Principal Officials and appointing members of the Executive Council in accordance with the Basic Law, the Chief Executive will take into consideration an individual's ability, expertise, experience, integrity and commitment to public service, regardless of gender.

(d) As we stated at the Motion Debate on "Perfecting the framework of advisory and statutory bodies" at the Legislative Council meeting on May 10, 2006, we will continue to monitor progress and to promote the participation of women in the work of advisory and statutory bodies. We will also consider raising the benchmark in due course, having regard to international practices and local circumstances.

Ends/Wednesday, June 28, 2006