

Proposals of Policy Address 2001 - (Information Technology, Telecommunications, Broadcasting and Film Services)

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1. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

1.1 General Policy and Infrastructure

1.1.1 Restructure Information Infrastructure Advisory Committee (IIAC)

To help Hong Kong become a leading digital city, Hong Kong needs an Information Infrastructure Development Council (IIDC) to replace IIAC.

The purpose of IIDC is to

- consolidate comments and ideas that help to develop the IT sector;
- coordinate the development of the information infrastructure.

This proposed body should be authoritatively higher than the existing IIAC. But it should not be a public body aimed at exploiting interest and advantage for its own sake. The government may consider the model of Singapore's Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) which was established in 1999 as reference.

1.1.2 Benchmarking the Digital Economy

The government should actively conduct surveys on IT development and application. More detailed statistics, pertinent analysis and comparison with other countries are needed to reflect and evaluate the IT development and application in Hong Kong. These statistics and analysis also serve as market information for e-commerce development.

1.1.3 Outsource Government IT projects

To improve the government's services quality, the government should continue to outsource IT projects. The government might consider breaking down large IT projects into smaller projects, making the bidding process considerably simpler, and increasing the transparency of tendering policy in order to facilitate SMEs in bidding these projects.

While adopting outsourcing strategy, the ITSD should also undertake at least one-third of IT services within the Government as a way to maintain professional standards of its staff through practical involvement in various IT projects.

1.1.4 Further Review of PNETS Charge and Promote Broadband Network

High PNETS charge is an obstacle for Hong Kong to become a digital city. Lower PNETS charge and wider adoption of broadband network will encourage more Internet usage and foster e-commerce. Therefore, PNETS charge should be further reduced to stimulate Internet usage.

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Information
Technology
and
Broadcasting
Bureau (ITBB)

ITBB

Information
Technology
Services
Department
(ITSD)

Office of the
Telecommunic
ations
Authority
(OFTA)

1.1.5 Facilitate the Development of Information System Security

To facilitate the development of Information System Security, the government has to

- work proactively with the International Standards institutions to ensure the development of Information System Security in Hong Kong is synchronized with international standards;
- take a lead to act as a model on government projects;
- promote standardization and guidelines for security for the public to follow. The government might work with IT professional bodies like Hong Kong Computer Society (HKCS), Hong Kong Society of Accountants (HKSA) and Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to maintain a self-disciplinary mechanism for the society.

ITBB/ITSD

1.2 e-Government

1.2.1 Promote Electronic Communication with Citizens

The government should encourage government officials use email or other electronic means to communicate and to provide services to the general public. Like, telephone numbers, email address of government officials should be made available to the public.

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ITBB/
Information Services Department (ISD)

1.2.2 Promote the use of Electronic Services Delivery (ESD) Scheme in the community

The first phase of ESD scheme was launched in late 2000, however, not all the government services are delivered in electronic way at the moment. To encourage all citizens using e-government services, we suggest the government to

- work out a detailed plan on the second phase of ESD scheme, making more public services online available as soon as possible;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the use of e-Cert;
- adopt a more competitive approach by opening ESD scheme to all browsers and OS users;
- review capacity of web server of ESD and work out contingency plan for accommodating heavy loading in emergencies, e.g. announcement of public examination results;
- provide financial reward or incentive such as tax rebate or discounts for those who use e-government services. By giving practical incentive to generate demand on ESD scheme, the public will soon become more familiar and receptive to use the e-government services.

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1.2.3 Expand Public Virtual Library Services

The government should further promote virtual public library by expanding the online services to 24/7 and allowing citizens not only to view categories of book collection, but also to make book reservation through the Internet. Besides, the government should explore the possibility of e-book development in Hong Kong.

Leisure and Cultural Services Dept (LCSD)

1.3 Intellectual Property Rights

1.3.1 Encourage the Use of Genuine Products and the Idea of Protection Intellectual Property Rights among Students.

The government may try to seek discount prices from the software industry for group students. Special offer may encourage IT application and promote use of genuine products among students.

1.3.2 Promote Fair Competition

The government should lead the way in promoting fair competition by

- opening different platforms of e-government services to end-users as soon as possible;
- adopting more alternatives and devising flexible tendering policy on procurement of government's IT facilities which are then more compatible and convertible to/among different OS/browsers.
- Promoting the use of open source software.

1.4 Digital Divide

1.4.1 Set up a Dedicated Working Group to bridge the Digital Divide in Hong Kong

Digital divide is a problem affecting every facets of our society. Because of its complexity, a working group which comprises of representatives from the Government, private and non-profit making sectors should be formed to develop a more "collaborative" approach to tackle the problem.

1.4.2 Benchmarking Hong Kong's Digital Divide

Government should develop a set of benchmark – Digital Divide Index to further review the information literacy and the progress of measure to tackle digital divide against worldwide standard. Besides, more studies to evaluate the social impact and in particular the needs of adopting and using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among the disadvantaged group are also needed as a reference to tailor relevant programmes for them.

1.4.3 Formulate a Clear Policy on Digital Divide

A clear policy on the issue of digital divide needs to be formulated as soon as possible. The use of ICT is rarely included in the existing social and welfare policies. The government has to take the lead to ensure that IT policies are well-blended into other relevant policies in order to support, secure and structure a balanced development in both fields.

1.4.4 Promote the Wider Use or Adoption of Online Public Services

The government should offer bonus, discounts or priority service for those who use online public services, such as filing tax return, paying bills, performing driving license registration, etc. Moreover, simple, easy-to-understand presentation and user-friendly interfaces are all-important considerations to make web-site accessible to and adopted by

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Intellectual Property Dept (IPD)/ Education Dept (ED)

ITBB/ITSD

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Finance Bureau (FB)

all people.

The government may learn from other nations, such as Netherlands and Australia, which develop guidelines on usability, navigation and common interface for all government web-sites.

1.4.5 Encourage the Private Sector to Help Disadvantaged Group Using ICT

The government may consider providing tax credits for vendors who donate equipment, provide free Internet access, professional ICT training and those design products and services catered to the disadvantaged group.

1.4.6 Allocate Additional Allowance for Disadvantaged Group to Purchase ICT Equipment and Services

Special allowance for the purchase of computer-related equipment or payment of Internet services charge should be additionally allocated to the low-income families or those receiving CSSA.

1.4.7 Educate the Public the Importance and Potential of ICT

To enhance people's awareness and acceptance towards the use of ICT, the government organized some promotional activities such as "IT Hong Kong" in the past. Further effort is needed to raise IT awareness among the disadvantaged groups in order to make them gradually understand and to be aware of the benefits of ICT.

1.4.8 Establish Recycled PC Scheme and Reused PC Clearinghouse

To enhance the availability of ICT among the disadvantaged group, the government should establish Recycled PC Scheme and Reused PC Clearinghouse to centralize all the donations from the private sector and to allocate equipment to the people in need. The government should consider funding the operations of the Clearinghouse.

1.4.9 Formulate a Comprehensive Web and e-commerce Accessibility Policy

A comprehensive web and e-commerce accessibility policy is a prerequisite to ensure ICT services and equipment are accessible for all people. The government has to conduct review of implications and barriers of e-commerce to the disadvantaged group. Government in other nations, such as Australia and Denmark already conducted in depth studies in this aspect. Our government should therefore consider similar initiatives to examine the impacts of e-commerce to the disadvantaged groups.

1.4.10 Foster the Use of Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is about the inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of society and how technology can facilitate this process in schools, at home, in workplace, and in the community. To achieve this goal, the government should

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- allocate funding to relevant organizations such as VTC, non-profit making agencies to train the trainers for the learners with disabilities;
- encourage IT industry and the academia to carry out research on customized software and assistive technology for people with disability;
- offer tax deduction to corporations, which adopt relevant assistive technology for their employees with disabilities.

1.5 Electronic Commerce

1.5.1 Review the Electronic Transactions Ordinance

To encourage greater use of electronic business transaction, the government has to review the operation of this legislation in order to upkeep the rapid technological development.

On the other hand, the government has to study the possibility of legally recognizing other kinds of e- signatures such as biometrics like fingerprint.

1.5.2 Promote the Subscription of e-Cert

To accelerate the development of e-commerce in Hong Kong, the wider use of e-Cert is a prerequisite. The HongkongPost might consider

- joint-partnership with other agencies, such as bank, adopting more diversified marketing strategy to promote the subscription of e-Cert;
- granting university students or secondary school graduates free e-Cert for one year of services because these are potential frequent users of e-services.

1.5.3 Facilitate HK-China Electronic Business Activities

As China will soon become a member of WTO, HK-China e-business activity is increasingly become frequent and important in both regions. In order to facilitate HK-China e-business, the government has to

- establish a connected network between the customs of Hong Kong and of the Mainland, so as to reduce the period of time going through the customs;
- evaluate the impacts to Hong Kong's SMEs after China entering the WTO;
- set up a dedicated program to help SMEs explore business opportunities in China by proactively outreaching and disseminating market-intelligence, coordinating business matching and referral services between HK-China business community.

1.5.4 Promote the Awareness of Consumer Rights

The government should promote the industry to take initiative in promoting a Quality-Marks (Q-marks) system to build up consumer confidence in cybershops. As the cost of Q-marks acquisition might be one of the hindrances for the adoption of this scheme, the government might consider putting a subsidy scheme in place for early adopters so as to encourage more cybershops to subscribe this scheme.

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ITBB/The
HongkongPost

Security
Bureau (SB)/
Commerce
and Industry
Bureau (CIB)

Economic
Services
Bureau (ESB)

1.6 Intelligent Transportation System

1.6.1 Formulate a Comprehensive Policy of Intelligent Transportation System

The application of information technology in transportation system is about to bring real-time traffic information, mobility services and more efficient transport management to various business sectors, the government and all individual consumers. Therefore, the government should formulate a comprehensive policy of Intelligent Transportation System as soon as possible with an aim to strive for full operation of Automatic Vehicle Locator System (AVLS), Global Positioning System (GPS) for navigation, intelligent highway system, electronic road information system and digital maps-based applications in Hong Kong. Topics like promoting public awareness of ITS services, ITS development road map, ITS commercialization issue ...etc. should be addressed or formulated.

Responsible Bureau/Dept
Transport Bureau (TB)

2. TELECOMMUNICATIONS

2.1 Combat the Existing Anti-competitive Practice in Fixed Telecommunication Network Services (FTNS) Market

To liberalize telecommunication market, the government has issued five FTNS licenses. However, consumers are still unable to enjoy the full benefits of market liberalization due to the existence of various hindrances, including excessive charges on interconnection services, administrative barriers to stifle the penetration of new operators, etc. As a result of these hindrances, most of FTNS users in Hong Kong are deprived of real choices for fixed-line services. In order to safeguard the interest of public and to provide a level playing field, the government should therefore strengthen its measures against all kinds of anti-competitive acts diminishing competition in FTNS market and other telecommunication services sector as well.

Responsible Bureau/Dept
OFTA

2.2 Assist FTNS and wireless-based FTNS providers in accessing buildings to extend network coverage

FTNS and wireless-based FTNS providers are now facing tremendous difficulties in accessing buildings to extend the coverage of their networks. OFTA should proactively monitor and implement necessary measures to facilitate the services providers' installation of telecommunications equipment in buildings in order to ensure that there is a wide range of fixed-line network in Hong Kong.

OFTA

2.3 Fully Liberalize the Local Wireline-based FTNS market

Hong Kong needs a completely open telecommunications market to capitalize on its competitive advantage. The government should invite applications for new FTNS licenses in 2001 and allow new licensees to set up telecommunications facilities for entering the market in 2003. This can speed up the liberalization process and attract foreign investments

OFTA

in order to maintain Hong Kong as a global communication hub in the world.

3. BROADCASTING AND FILM SERVICES

3.1 Strive for Corporatisation of RTHK

Corporatisation of RTHK will strengthen the editorial independence of RTHK and will ensure its neutral standpoint and opinion provided to the public is free from the government's interference.

3.2 Combine Broadcasting Division of TELA and OFTA into Office of Telecommunication and Broadcasting Authority (OFTBA)

We suggest the Broadcasting Division of TELA to combine with OFTA and form the Office of Telecommunication and Broadcasting Authority (OFTBA). While the existing Broadcasting Authority should continue to operate as the content regulator, the new authority (OFTBA) should be the technical and competition regulator.

3.3 Collaborate with China for Digital TV standards

The government should work in collaboration with Mainland China on new Digital TV standards.

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Television and
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Licensing
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(TELA)

ITBB

4. IT MANPOWER AND EDUCATION

4.1 Apply IT in Education

4.1.1 Review the 5-Year Strategy for IT Education

It has been three years since the government in 1998 released a five-year strategy and earmarked \$3.2 billion for promoting IT education. The government should now evaluate the progress and results of these measures, and review the policy. Possible funding for next phase of IT Education should be considered.

4.1.2 Convert HKEducationCity into a Permanent Education Portal

HKEducationCity.net was available for provisional use since 2000. To promote the culture of using IT in education, we recommend the government to convert HKEducationCITY.net into a permanent portal, which allows schools, teachers, students, parents and public to deliver and to share quality education information and services through the Internet.

4.1.3 Review Pilot Sponsorship for Secondary School Leavers to Take Practical IT Training Courses

This pilot project, which targeted at 500 F.5 and F.7 school leavers, will be on trial in the coming summer vacation. The Government should conduct a review of the effectiveness of this pilot project with a view to putting in place the long-term sponsorship scheme starting from 2002.

4.1.4 Overhaul the Education Television (ETV) Service

In the Information Age, effective learning is based on discovery and

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Education and
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participation through the use of new media tools. The top-down, one-way and teacher-centered approach in broadcasting information to students is obsolescence and is no longer preferred.

Department (ED)/ RTHK

We urge the Education Department and RTHK to revamp the existing content and delivery mode of ETV service by replacing with Digital Interactive Learning programs, such as digital-forums, -seminars, -workshops and etc. for students to have higher participation in the learning process. To create an interactive learning environment, we suggest the government to revamp existing education curriculum, making use of new digital media to transform the outdated learning approach in Hong Kong.

4.1.5 Provide IT Coordinator in Each School

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To attain the goal of letting every school to have enough funding for hiring at least one full time computer technician so that schools can accelerate their pace for incorporating IT in education. The government might also consider organizing the IT coordinators into a network of frontline workers through HKEducationCity. By doing so, the IT coordinators are provided with support, administration and continuous professional education to maintain their skills and knowledge up-to-date.

4.2 Educate IT in School

EMB/
University
Grant
Committee
(UGC)

4.2.1 Increase the Intake of IT-related Degree Holders

We urge the government to increase the intake of IT-related degree holders by allocating additional resources to the local tertiary education institutes. In order to keep Hong Kong in the forefront of world IT development, we have to secure sufficient IT graduates to meet the market demand.

4.2.2 Adopt International Standards in IT Education

EMB/
UGC

To enhance the quality of IT people, educating IT skills with international standards, such as ISO and IEEE in the university is recommended. Application of international standards can serve to improve the quality of IT people, making Hong Kong as an international IT city.

4.2.3 Trigger More IT-related Associate-Degree Courses

EMB

The government should trigger more IT-related associate-degree courses, such as skills on programming, software engineering, PC hardware maintenance and network management to the secondary school leavers in order to let them acquire wide spectrum of IT skills and knowledge.

4.3 Develop a Quality IT Manpower Force

ITBB/EMB

4.3.1 Set up a Software Technology Institute (STI)

The software technology is an area highly susceptible to rapid change, that we must devote more resources to develop and upgrade a pool of local manpower that will eventually become software professionals possessing the state-of-the-art knowledge.

A dedicated Software Technology Institute providing associate-degree courses enduring for 2-3 years, is one of the ways to nurture our local IT professionals. We propose that the government might co-invest with major multi-national IT companies in running this Institute in order to keep up with the technology trends and development. (Appendix I)

4.3.2 Establish Training Voucher System

To ensure our current manpower skills are relevant and responsive to the market needs, we suggest the government to implement “Training Voucher System”, supplementing the existing subsidization of training resources to the subvented organizations such as ERB and VTC. The “Training Voucher System”, aims to encourage the employers to invest in employee training and to allow the end user to buy training course from an open market of public sector or private sector in the area of training services. The system is not beneficial only in retraining and upgrading our manpower, but also creating demand to the IT training services market.

4.3.3 Encourage the Juvenile Delinquent Adopting IT Skills

To facilitate a smooth re-integration into the community, Hong Kong Correctional Services (HKCS) now provides vocational training courses on commercial and industrial skills to juvenile delinquent in correctional institutions. As IT knowledge is increasingly becoming important in our society, we suggest HKCS to provide young inmates sufficient IT facilities and training.

One of the suggestions is to include IT Assistant Training Programme (ITAT) in its rehabilitation services, and to encourage inmates to study for the assessment test offered by Information Technology Training & Development Centre (ITTDC) of VTC. These aim at helping youngsters to entering the workforce on their discharge by acquiring the practical skills of IT.

4.3.4 Issue Multiple-entry Business Visa to Mainland IT Professionals

To ease the short-term manpower pressure, the government may consider lifting the requirements on the work permits for Mainland IT professionals. For instance, issue a multi-entry business visa to those Mainland IT professionals who are employed by local companies, providing greater flexibility and convenience for their frequent cross-border business activities.

4.3.5 Conduct Regular Review of IT Manpower Needs

The government should regularly conduct study on the short- and long-term IT manpower needs. More research will be needed to closely monitor the specific requirements and demands from the industrial side. Data will then serve as a reference for adjusting strategies tailored to enhance the IT manpower supply and to bridge the skill gap corresponding to the dynamic demand from the market.

EMB

Security Bureau (SB)/
Hong Kong Correctional Services (HKCS)

SB

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4.3.6 Review the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme

In the midst of massive lay-off earlier in the IT sector, the government has to take an immediate review of the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme. This is aimed at ensuring the supply of Mainland professionals matched up to the changing demand in Hong Kong's labor market and preventing a drastic increase in unemployment in the IT sector.

SB

5. Miscellaneous

5.1 Enhance the Cluster Effect in Cyberport

The government should consider allowing non-profit IT organizations to set up offices in the Cyberport at lower rent. This is to enhance the cluster effect in Cyberport by promoting more IT-related activities to be organized and held in the area.

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5.2 Establish a Greater China Online Digital Research Library

The library aims at promoting research and collaboration between Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. The online digital library should link up with research results, new products and patents information of universities, research institute and government funded research in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Archives and updated research material of the online digital library will help industries to look for the technologies they need.

ITBB/UGC