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Active role urged for equality body

By Cynthia Wan

SPEAKERS at an employment seminar yesterday urged the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) to play a more active role.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs, a trade union lawyer and a social science professor said the commission should be more active in investigating cases and protecting victims.

"The office should initiate investigations when a victim is not willing to come forward. It should try to create public discussion on a case and open up more by, for example, inviting the public to their meetings," City University of Hong Kong assistant professor Leung Lai-ching said.

Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions in-house lawyer Kwong Chi-kin said:

"You'd (EOC) be able to gain a lot of confidence from the public if you can do just what the Consumer Council has done."

He cited the council's recent action against a model agency which allegedly approached young people in the street and took money from them with empty promises of stardom.

But EOC chairwoman Fanny Cheung Mui-ching said the commission's authority was restricted by two

ordinances — the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Disability Discrimination Ordinance — and was not empowered to investigate without the consent of the complainant.

"We're not the Consumer Council or the Independent Commission Against Corruption, which can launch investigations of suspected cases, or the Legislative Council which opens its debate sessions to the public," Dr Cheung said.

"But we will educate the public about discrimination with an actual case when the time is right."

Last month the commission completed a two-month investigation of a case involving a company which was categorised as "providing services and goods".

The EOC, which is a statutory body, has received up to 1,600 inquiries and more than 60 complaints since the Disability Discrimination Ordinance took effect in September and the Sex Discrimination Ordinance was passed in December.

Dr Cheung said the office would review its operations and the function of the two ordinances in December and would make amendments if they were necessary.

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