

1,600 more jobs for disabled

The Social Welfare Department will secure jobs for 1,600 disabled people during the next 10 years.

This was disclosed yesterday by the head of the department's Rehabilitation Division, Mr Khoo Tai-pin.

He said at least 13 sheltered workshops will be provided for the disabled on a district basis during the period.

The Rehabilitation Green Paper had forecast demand for 1,365 workshop places in the next four years.

"The sheltered workshops are being planned in line with the Government's policy to set up more such workshops for the disabled. These plans will be reviewed annually to keep pace with the demand and to adapt to the changing needs of the disabled community," Mr Khoo said.

The first workshop in the new series, to be set up in Shatin Lek Yuen Estate this autumn, will provide work for 100.

The department already runs seven such workshops, providing employment for 600 people who are either blind, deaf, ex-mental patients, mentally retarded or physically handicapped.

Sheltered workshops, Mr Khoo said, help the disabled, who are incapable of competitive employment, make full use of their residual capacities by offering them productive and remunerative employment in a sheltered environment.

These workers are primarily engaged in assembling work which may be part-finished or just packaging.

All materials are supplied

by the manufacturer. Hardly any cost is involved in additional materials or ancillary facilities, and thus minimises the need for capital, Mr Khoo said.

"With the absence of overheads to be recouped from sheltered workers, there is no deduction whatsoever from their earnings and they can take home as much as they are able to earn on a piece rate basis, which is entirely at the market rate for the same type of work done by able-bodied workers," he said.

In addition, each sheltered worker is given incentive payment of \$3.50 per day and provided free transport or full reimbursement of travelling expenses, Mr Khoo pointed out.

"Job orders are procured by the department's rehabilitation officers with regard to the number and abilities of the disabled in their charge. The work is scheduled, taught and supervised by trade instructors or workshop supervisors," Mr Khoo said.

However, he noted that sheltered workers are not employees of the workshops or the Social Welfare Department.

"Rather, they may look upon themselves as their own boss, with facilities provided by the department to enable them to do so," he said.

Sub-contract work for firms and non-commercial undertakings, though simple, unrefined and without frill or fuss, is economical and effective. It is considered to be most conducive to making fullest use of the efforts of the sheltered workers, Mr Khoo explained.