

Information Paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Employment Information Superhighway of the Labour Department

Introduction

This paper informs Members of the latest enhancement in the Labour Department's employment services, viz. the development of an Employment Information Superhighway and the enhancement of the placement service on the Internet for local domestic helpers.

Background

2. Job vacancy information has hitherto been scattered at different public and private employment agencies, newspapers and different employment web sites. This often leads to delays and under-utilization of available vacancies, thus prolonging the period of unemployment of job seekers and a waste of efforts for placement officers and employers recruiting employees.

The Employment Information Superhighway

3. The Employment Information Superhighway is developed on the platform of the Labour Department's 'interactive Employment Service' (iES) which is a service first launched in March 1999 using Internet technology. In the iES, vacancy information and profiles of job seekers are stored in a computer. They are sorted and compared automatically by the computer for easy retrieval by categories, levels of salaries and geographical location. In this way, by using the Internet, job seekers can search for suitable vacancies and employers can select suitable candidates from information registered with the Labour Department at any time of the day.

4. This iES has recently been further improved. It has now more user-friendly functions such as helping the user to build his own

resume and keep a personal preference list. It also allows prospective job seekers to register on-line and create their own accounts in the Department's employment database. An electronic location map is built in to help job seekers locate their prospective employers to attend interviews. This website has quickly become one of the most frequently visited government web sites, attracting an average of 100 000 page-hits a day.

Employment Portal

5. Access to the iES will lead to the newly developed Employment Information Superhighway. This Superhighway has two components. The first is the development of an Employment Portal and the second is the extension of accessibility of job information for visitors to the Labour Department's employment services to those in private employment agencies.

6. The Employment Portal is developed on the phenomenon of an upsurge last year of a large number of high quality, privately funded employment web sites. Many of them were related to the job advertisement sections of major newspapers and magazines. The Labour Department's initiative is to build up an Employment Portal to become an open platform for linking up all the major local employment web sites. The Portal will be maintained by the Employment Services Division of the Labour Department. Any job seeker or employer visiting the Portal will be able to gain access to all the vacancy information available at the sites hyperlinked to the Portal.

7. Through a series of discussions, the Portal is now hyperlinked to nine leading employment websites. A pilot run started on 23 October 2000 and now job seekers and employers only need to visit the iES site at www.jobs.gov.hk to gain access to the Employment Information Superhighway and, through the Portal, to all the vacancy information available on the private employment agency sites listed on the webpage.

Partnership with Private Employment Agencies

8. Another key component of the Employment Information Superhighway is the partnership with private employment agencies. Many private employment agencies offer quality service for employers in return for a fee. They have access to many high quality vacancies but may not have a sizable database of job seekers. Previously, the Employment Services of the Labour Department and these private employment agencies work independently and do not share their vacancies information. The result is that both are working within their own pool of information and from the perspective of the job seekers and employers, are not maximizing the full market potential. Since 22 December 2000, the Employment Services Division of the Labour Department has entered into a partnership with the private employment agencies which allows the latter to lodge the vacancies of their clients through the iES free of charge.

9. Private employment agencies participating in this scheme have to agree to adhere to a Code of Practice issued by the Labour Department. This includes, among others, waiver of fees or expenses from job seekers, and the compliance with the provisions under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. The benefit for them will be the display of their vacancy information, including the names of the employment agencies and the person to contact, at the 11 job centres of the Employment Services Division as well as on the iES web. With such information available from the Labour Department offices, anyone interested in the job vacancies can contact the employment agencies direct to arrange for job interviews. Employment agencies can also search for suitable job seekers in respect of the vacancies in hand from the large pool of job seekers registered with the Labour Department. In this way, both the private agencies and job registrants will benefit from the expanded pool of information available from the Labour Department.

Enhancing the Web Page for Local Domestic Helper Posts

10. Many of those seeking employment in Hong Kong are unskilled workers with low education attainment. Some of them can only work for a few hours on some of the days in a week because of other commitments. At the same time there is a constant demand for domestic helpers for household work. Such vacancies are very suitable

for these unemployed people who may choose to work part time or full time and on days to be agreed with the employers. To tap the full potential of the local domestic helpers market, the Labour Department has introduced a number of measures to help job seekers looking for domestic helper posts and employers recruiting local domestic helpers. Such measures include regular promotion of domestic helper vacancies, dedicated officers at job centres to assist prospective domestic helpers, regular briefing sessions on market information and job search skills and a dedicated web page under the iES.

11. The Labour Department is enhancing this dedicated web page for local domestic helpers. A number of new features and functions will be added to the new web page. This will include a tailor-made search engine for jobs to take account of the myriad combination of short working hours and special working days for part-time employment in the domestic helper market. There will be special sections to provide guidance for job seekers and tips for employers, including the availability of previous employers' references for individual job-seekers.

12. The Labour Department will also step up its cooperation with the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) in the sharing of vacancy information and on line registration of graduates of domestic helper retraining courses. Employers accessing the iES will be able to browse through the profiles of all registered job seekers including the domestic helper training they received under the retraining scheme.

13. By introducing the enhancement measures, we hope to be able to make the website more user-friendly and informative, thus enhancing employers' confidence and convenience in the recruitment of local domestic helpers and further facilitating the job-matching services for this expanding job category. The enhanced web page for domestic helpers is being tested and will be launched by the end of January 2001.

Labour Department
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