

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1078/08-09(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 19 March 2009**

Employment services of the Labour Department

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Panel on Manpower (the Panel) on the employment services of the Labour Department (LD).

Deliberations of the Panel on Manpower

2. According to information provided by the Administration, LD's work in employment services includes job placement and launching of employment programmes to help different groups of job seekers. LD has introduced measures regularly to enhance employment services in response to market needs and economic development. The following paragraphs seek to summarize the main concerns raised by members.

Job placement services

3. According to the Administration, job placement services provided by LD included operating job centres to provide comprehensive employment information, organizing job fairs, operating a website on the Internet to disseminate job market information round-the-clock, setting up hotlines and special counters to provide priority job referrals and job matching services to affected employees of large insolvency cases, etc.

4. A member enquired about the number of jobs successfully secured through LD's placement services, whether and how the achievement of LD in job placement would be publicized, and whether LD would consider extending its placement services to cover more senior positions. The member also enquired about LD's measures to facilitate more job placement.

5. The Administration advised that it had achieved 146 308 placements in 2008, representing an increase of 8% over 2007. Apart from publicizing the result of job placements in LD's monthly newsletter, the Administration would also consider the possibility of announcing the unemployment rate and the number of successful placements at the same time. Bearing in mind that the free placement services provided by LD were targeted at job seekers who did not have very high qualifications, LD was cautious about its positioning in the job market to ensure that it would not compete with employment agencies in the private sector in respect of senior position placement.

6. The Administration further advised that job centres provided a lot of job market information to help job seekers, among which was the posting of charts listing the types of vacancies available and the types of jobs most wanted by job seekers. There were often mismatches, and job seekers who were willing to take on jobs of other fields would have more opportunities. In this regard, placement officers would help job seekers to evaluate their academic qualifications, job skills, work experience and job preferences, with a view to facilitating them to look for suitable jobs actively and recommending suitable training if they were willing to change their field of work.

7. Some members expressed concern about the low percentage of participants of the Support for Self-Reliance Scheme of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) who had secured employment. The Administration responded that updated information on the job vacancies received by LD was made available at the Vacancy Search Terminals installed in all Social Security Field Units of SWD and the Public Enquiry Service Centres of the Home Affairs Department. Most of the job centres of LD and the Social Security Field Units of SWD were either adjacent to each other or located in the same building.

Special employment programmes

8. According to the Administration, LD had implemented a number of programmes to help placing different groups of job seekers into employment. These included programmes for young people, persons with disabilities (PWDs), job seekers living in remote areas, etc.

Programmes for young people

9. The Panel was informed that the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP) launched in September 1999 and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS) launched in July 2002 sought to provide a full range of pre-employment and on-the-job training to young people aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment below the degree level. In December 2007, the Youth Employment Start (YES) first came into operation to provide one-stop advisory and support service on employment and

self-employment to young people aged 15 to 29.

10. Some members expressed concern that young people, especially fresh graduates, would have difficulty in finding jobs because of lack of working experience. They enquired about the job opportunities and training provided to young people aged 15 to 24.

11. The Administration responded that the problem of youth unemployment was not uncommon in other economies, especially in the 15 to 19 age group. YPTP and YWETS provided "through-train" pre-employment/on-the-job training and placement assistance to youths aged 15 to 24. YPTP provided youths with a comprehensive range of employment-related training and workplace attachment where the trainees would be paid an attachment allowance of \$2,000. To complement the pre-employment training under YPTP, YWETS provided real job opportunities to young people in the form of six to 12 months' on-the-job training. The trainees, with the assistance of their case managers, should be able to find jobs in the open-market or seek placement through the referral of LD. For those trainees undertaking vocational training courses on an off-the-job basis, they would be paid a training allowance of \$4,000 under YWETS if they passed the examinations and fulfilled the attendance requirement.

12. The Administration advised that it was undertaking a review of the mode of operation, training contents and future directions of YPTP and YWETS. The review would also take into account youth training courses offered under the Employment Retraining Scheme to ensure the optimal use of resources and foster the provision of coordinated training and employment support for young people. The Administration aimed to complete the review by end-2008 and implement the recommendations by phases from September 2009.

13. Some members enquired about the support provided for young people to start their career and for those who intended to be self-employed. A member asked about the measures to motivate the "hidden" youths to look for jobs. These members also enquired about the operation of YES.

14. The Administration responded that YES operated in tandem with YPTP and YWETS to provide career assessment and guidance to young people. The two YESs, located at Langham Place in Mongkok and at Metroplaza in Kwai Fong, were popular gathering places of young people. The two centres provided a full range of office facilities and services for free. These included well-equipped business workstations, meeting room and design corner with professional design software/hardware. At each YES, LD partnered with a non-government organization (NGO) experienced in youth services to provide professional counselling service to young people in need of motivational assistance or emotional support. Locating YES at popular gathering places of

young people was an initiative of LD to attract the "hidden" youths who might be reluctant to visit the government offices where employment services were provided. By the end of 2008, the two YESs had together provided services to 63 636 young people. Some young people had become self-employed magicians, specialists on pet care, etc. after training.

15. A member pointed out that YES did not provide financial loan to young people and asked whether LD would consider helping young people to develop their own businesses in the form of social enterprises with tax concession.

16. The Administration explained that while the development of social enterprises was under the purview of the Home Affairs Bureau, the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) under the Labour and Welfare Bureau provided funds to promote the development of social capital through encouraging mutual support in the neighbourhood, community participation and cross-sectoral partnerships. Some of the recent CIIF-funded businesses ran by NGOs in collaboration with young people included the formation of a dance troop to perform hip hop dance, the setting up of a café in Shek Pai Wan, and the opening of a studio in Aberdeen to take bridal photos.

Programme for job seekers living in remote areas

17. The Panel was informed that the Transport Support Scheme (the Scheme) launched on 25 June 2007 on a one-year pilot basis in four designated remote districts (i.e. Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, North and Island districts) sought to encourage needy job seekers and low-income employees to find jobs and work across districts. Upon a review of the pilot scheme in February 2008, the Administration introduced a number of relaxation measures in July 2008. In the face of the financial tsunami, some members requested the Administration to further relax the Scheme to operate on a long-term basis and to cover other districts in order to provide assistance to all low-income workers.

18. The Administration responded that members' proposal represented a major departure from the objective of the Scheme which was a time-limited subsidy offered to the unemployed and low-income workers in the four designated remote districts only. The Administration did not consider it appropriate to provide the subsidy on a permanent basis, which was tantamount to providing an income supplement to the employees on a long-term basis. Expanding the Scheme to cover all other districts would have significant policy and financial implications. The Administration would gauge public views after the relaxed Scheme had been implemented for at least one year, when detailed work statistics would be available for a comprehensive evaluation of the outcome and effectiveness of the Scheme.

Programme for PWDs

19. The Panel held a joint meeting with the Panel on Welfare on 6 July 2006 to discuss measures to promote employment opportunities for PWDs.

20. Some members expressed concern about the high unemployment rate of PWDs. The Administration responded that it was the Government's policy to assist PWDs to develop their personal capabilities in order to secure jobs in the open market. With this policy objective in mind, SWD provided a full range of rehabilitation and vocational training services to equip people with disabilities for employment. The Administration also stepped up publicity to promote equal employment opportunities for the disabled, and encouraged employers to offer more employment to people with disabilities. The Selective Placement Division of LD provided personalized employment assistance to PWDs, with the objective of placing them into jobs that best suited their abilities. The employment services included vocational assessment and counselling, job matching and referral, as well as follow-up service after placement.

21. Some members urged the Administration to put in place a quota system for the employment of PWDs. The quota system could apply to large corporations in the beginning, together with tax incentives, to encourage them to employ PWDs. The Administration considered that it was neither necessary nor appropriate to impose a mandatory requirement for companies to employ a certain number of PWDs, having regard to overseas experience and Hong Kong's situation. The Administration noted that most of the companies in Hong Kong were small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and a quota system would pose problems to many SMEs. The Administration believed that the prevailing policy and arrangements, which placed emphasis on vocational training and educational publicity, were more effective.

Programme for ethnic minorities

22. At the Panel meeting on 17 November 2005, a member enquired how the Administration would ensure that its employment service could reach the ethnic minorities. The Administration responded that Resource Corners had been set up at job centres for ethnic minorities. The Administration was promoting its employment service through the Home Affairs Department's committee on ethnic minorities, relevant consulates and NGOs such as the Christian Action.

23. According to the Administration, one of the initiatives of the 2008-2009 Policy Agenda under the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau was to set up four regional support service centres for ethnic minorities. These centres would provide ethnic minorities with telephone interpretation services and training to improve their Chinese and English proficiencies. The centres

would also organize activities and provide services to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities.

Programme for local domestic helpers (LDHs)

24. A member requested the Administration to reinstate the Special Incentive Allowance Scheme for Local Domestic Helpers working across districts. The Administration responded that the scheme was launched during the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome as a short-term measure to relieve the problem of unemployment. At that time, there was a mismatch in the supply and demand of LDHs arising from geographical locations and working hours. It was hoped that the offering of incentive, which was capped at \$7,200 per LDH per year, would help develop the LDH market. The Scheme lapsed by the end of October 2008 as planned because the LDH market had been developing well.

Relevant papers

25. Members may wish to refer to the following minutes and papers for further details -

Minutes

- (a) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 November 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)654/05-06];
- (b) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 6 July 2006 [LC Paper No. CB(2)3138/05-06];
- (c) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 5 July 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2636/06-07];
- (d) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 January 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1075/07-08];
- (e) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 23 October 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)481/08-09];

Papers

- (f) Administration's paper entitled "Employment service of the Labour Department" for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 November 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)356/05-06(05)];

- (g) Administration's paper entitled "Measures to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities" for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 6 July 2006 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2613/05-06(01)];
- (h) Administration's paper entitled "Latest progress of Labour Department's youth employment resource centres" for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 January 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)809/07-08(03)]; and
- (i) Administration's paper entitled "Labour Department's overall performance in labour administration in 2008" for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 19 February 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)864/08-09(03)].

26. The above minutes and papers are also available on the website of the Legislative Council (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>).

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 March 2009