

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)917/09-10
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 December 2009, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room B of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

Public Officers attending : Item II

Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Mr Stanley NG Ka-kwong, JP
Assistant Commissioner (Employment Services)
Labour Department

Mr Kath CHAN Kwok-keung
Senior Labour Officer (Youth Employment)
Labour Department

Item III

Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Mr FONG Ngai
Assistant Commissioner (Policy Support and Strategic
Planning)
Labour Department

Mr Kieron SHEUNG Zhen-ting
Administrative Officer (Employment)
Labour Department

Miss Freda TUNG Sze-wan
Senior Statistician (Social) 2
Census and Statistics Department

Clerk in attendance : Mr Raymond LAM
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

Staff in attendance : Miss Josephine SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Mr Ian CHOW
Council Secretary (2) 1

Ms Kiwi NG
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

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I. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)523/09-10(01) and (02))

Regular meeting in January 2010

Members agreed that the following items proposed by the Administration would be discussed at the next regular meeting to be held on 21 January 2010 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) Safety in the use of tower cranes on construction sites; and

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- (b) Overview of Labour Department's efforts in labour administration in 2009.

Special meeting in January 2010

2. The Chairman reminded members that a special meeting would be held on Thursday, 14 January 2010, from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm to receive public views on the Transport Support Scheme (TSS).

3. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed grave concern about the progress of the review conducted by the Administration on TSS. He recalled that the Administration had undertaken to complete the review within 2009. He asked whether the review report would be made available to members for discussion at the meeting on 14 January 2010.

4. Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW) responded that the review of TSS was in full swing, and the Administration aimed at completing the review by the end of 2009. SLW said that the Administration would take into account the views and suggestions to be raised by deputations at the Panel meeting on 14 January 2010 before finalizing the way forward for TSS. He assured members that the Administration would put in its best endeavours to finalize the report at the earliest opportunity.

5. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan and Mr Andrew CHENG considered that the Administration should provide the Panel with its report on the review of TSS before the special meeting, so that members and deputations attending the meeting on 14 January 2010 could give further views on TSS based on the findings in the review report.

Other issues

6. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered that the Administration should conduct a comprehensive review of the existing regulatory framework governing occupational safety and health in the construction industry, with a view to mapping out comprehensive plans and strategies for enhancing industrial safety at construction sites. Mr LEE suggested that the issue should be added to the list of outstanding items for discussion at a future meeting.

7. SLW responded that the Administration was fully aware of members' concern about construction safety. The Labour Department (LD) would continue to work closely with the relevant bodies of the trade, the Occupational Safety and Health Council and the Development Bureau to explore further measures for enhancing work safety on construction sites. The Administration would brief the Panel once specific proposals were available.

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II. Measures taken by the Labour Department to promote youth employment

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)523/09-10(03) and (04))

8. SLW briefed members on the measures taken by LD to promote youth employment, as detailed in the Administration's paper. He said that the Administration would arrange a visit for members to facilitate their understanding of Youth Employment Start (YES).

9. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP) and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS) in assisting young people in finding jobs. He considered that the Administration should review the design of these two programmes with a view to strengthening the element of vocational training in YPTP and YWETS.

10. Mr WONG Sing-chi asked whether there were objective yardsticks for assessing the overall effectiveness of YPTP and YWETS. Referring to paragraph 12 of the Administration's paper, he sought further details on how the integrated YPTP-YWETS programme operated.

11. In response, SLW and Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employment Services) (ACL(ES)) explained that -

- (a) while YPTP provided a wide range of modular training on leadership, job-search and interpersonal skills, computer application and job-specific skills, YWETS offered job placements with on-the-job training of six to 12 months' duration with a view to enhancing the employability of young people, facilitating their smooth transition to employment and achieving further skills development;
- (b) to meet the diversified needs and interests of trainees, tailor-made training-cum-employment projects such as the IT Seeds Project, were organized under YPTP and YWETS in collaboration with employers and training bodies;
- (c) to proactively assist young people in navigating their career journey, LD had further enhanced and integrated YPTP and YWETS into a through-train programme (the revamped programme). With effect from the 2009-2010 Programme Year commencing in September 2009, the revamped programme had, among other improvement initiatives, extended the provision of personalized career guidance and counselling services by 12 months for trainees who had secured employment so as to better assist them to settle in their jobs, overcome problems in the

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workplaces, and pursue further learning and skills upgrading opportunities; and

- (d) trainees enrolled in the revamped programme were entitled to a full range of coordinated and customized training and employment support services, including case management services rendered by registered social workers. Response of young people to the revamped programme was encouraging. From the commencement of enrollment on 14 August 2009 to the end of November 2009, some 10 000 applications were received, representing an increase of about 40% over the corresponding period in 2008.

12. Dr LAM Tai-fai expressed deep concern about the high unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24. In his view, the problem arose from the failure of the existing education system in meeting the needs of multiple talents of young people at school age. He pointed out that with the provision of nine-year free education since 1978, the majority of schools in Hong Kong had been offering conventional curriculum. Given the increasingly diverse values in the community and the multi-faceted demands on Hong Kong's work force in the face of rapid changing technology and increasing globalization, there was a need to inject more diversity into the education system to give students more choices in the selection of schools and curricula which could cater for individual aptitude and interests. Dr LAM hoped that LD would discuss the matter with the Education Bureau, with a view to devising concrete measures to address the problem of youth unemployment.

13. Echoing Dr LAM Tai-fai's view, Dr PAN Pey-chyou suggested that the Administration should take the opportunity of implementing the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education (the 334 structure) to provide more diversity in the education system.

14. In response, SLW and Commissioner for Labour (C for L) advised that -

- (a) the unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 was persistently higher than the overall unemployment rate. This phenomenon was not peculiar to Hong Kong and was encountered by economies at various stages of economic development. According to the Global Employment Trends published by the International Labour Organisation in May 2009, prior to the onset of the financial tsunami, young people aged 15 to 24 were 2.8 times as likely to be unemployed as adults at the global level. Over the past five years, the youth unemployment rate of people aged 15 to 24 in Hong Kong was on average 2.1 times of the overall unemployment rate;
- (b) with no or very little working experience, young people often found it difficult to secure and find suitable jobs. At times of

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economic adversity, it would be more difficult for them to seek employment. On one hand, they would face keener competition for the reduced opportunities in the employment market. On the other hand, they would have to stand a higher risk of redundancy due to their lower employability;

- (c) LD had all along spared no effort in promoting youth employment. It adopted a multi-pronged strategy and worked closely with stakeholders and other social partners to assist young people to develop their careers, through providing a full range of recruitment and placement services in general and administering dedicated training and employment programmes for young people in particular. Under YPTP and YWETS, tailor-made employment projects were organized to provide comprehensive training and employment services to trainees. Participating youths would acquire useful job-specific skills, apart from gaining working experience. For instance, a project for Tradesman Trainees co-organized with the Vocational Training Council (VTC) offering 1 200 training places was well received by many major employers, including public utility companies. During the past three years, LD had also organized a tailor-made course on aircraft maintenance with an aircraft engineering company, which was a very successful example of tailor-made employment projects for young people; and
- (d) while the Administration would consider organizing more tailor-made and value-adding training-cum-employment projects in collaboration with employers and training bodies, such as the VTC, it was understood that modules aimed at facilitating students' diversified development, such as "Applied Learning" and "Other Learning Experience", were offered under the 334 structure.

15. In view of the difficulty faced by young people in getting employment, Mr Andrew CHENG considered that the Administration should co-ordinate the work of different policy bureaux and government departments, with a view to utilizing the resources more fully to help the youth develop their potentials and talents, upgrade their vocational skills and secure employment in the labour market. Mr CHENG further said that he had grave reservations about the idea of encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses. In his view, young people were doomed to fail if they had not acquired the necessary work experience and built up their interpersonal network before seeking to become an entrepreneur.

16. Citing successful business models of self-employment which he learned during the overseas duty visit to South Korea by the Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation, Mr Frederick FUNG stressed the importance of providing

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sufficient support for young entrepreneurs. He sought further details about the services, in particular the self-employment support, provided under YES.

17. In response, SLW said that the Administration shared members' view on the need for greater commitment in nurturing the talents of young people. Regarding the support services on employment and self-employment for young people aged 15 to 29, SLW and ACL(ES) explained that YES sought to provide one-stop and personalized advisory and support services on employment and self-employment to young people aged 15 to 29 with different backgrounds and development needs. The services of YES were offered through two Resource Centres respectively in Langham Place, Mongkok and Metroplaza, Kwai Chung. Young people registered as members of YES could have free access to a wide range of office facilities and services, including well-equipped business workstations, meeting rooms and a design corner with professional design software/hardware, for job search. For those who wanted to become self-employed, the centres could serve as a contact point for them to conduct business. To cater for the distinct needs of potential entrepreneurs, YES regularly held workshops and professional advisory sessions on self-employment, and invited renowned professionals and celebrities to offer mentoring assistance, to deliver talks and to share experience with young people.

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18. SLW informed members that YES had served as an effective platform for young people to build up their network and to engage in self-employment. This was evidenced by the fact that many members of YES could secure employment opportunities by means of giving public performance in variety shows and community activities. Mr Frederick FUNG requested the Administration to provide more detailed information in this respect.

19. The Deputy Chairman and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered that the Administration should vigorously promote the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, given its usefulness in providing young people with lower education attainment with a progression ladder in respect of training for entering a specific trade. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that the Administration, in taking forward the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, should make sure the training and related placement under the scheme could help the young people adjust to changes in the employment market arising from Hong Kong's economic restructuring, with a view to acquiring new or enhanced vocational skills.

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20. The Chairman expressed concern whether some employers had abused the Work Trial Scheme. She enquired about the number of job seekers being offered employment after completing work trial. ACL(ES) responded that, based on past experience of the Work Trial Scheme, over 70% of participants were offered employment upon completion of work trial. As regards the retention rate of work trial participants, the Administration undertook to provide the figures after the meeting.

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21. Dr LAM Tai-fai and Mr WONG Sing-chi noted with concern that by the end of November 2009, only some 1 200 graduates had secured employment in Hong Kong under the Internship Programme for University Graduates (IPUG) and another 200 had firmed up internships on the Mainland. They asked whether the response was within the Administration's expectation. Mr WONG Kwok-kin enquired whether it was possible to extend the internship programme to sub-degree holders to cater for their employment needs, given the fact that some 2 600 internship places remained unfilled.

22. In response, SLW and C for L advised that in the face of a deteriorating employment market amidst the widespread repercussions of the financial tsunami, LD had launched IPUG as a special and time-limited initiative to encourage enterprises to offer internship and employment opportunities to recent university graduates, with a view to broadening their horizons and helping them gain experience so that they would be better equipped for the employment market when the economy revived. While IPUG was expected to benefit about 4 000 graduates, it was noteworthy that some 1 400 university graduates had benefited from the programme since the commencement of enrollment in August 2009. SLW said that as the implementation of IPUG was in full swing, the Administration would step up the publicity of the programme to promote the awareness of IPUG among university graduates.

23. Regarding the suggestion of extending the internship programme to sub-degree holders, SLW explained that as a special and time-limited measure, IPUG was implemented to render targeted assistance to university graduates during the economic downturn. As to sub-degree holders, the two youth employment programmes, namely, YPTP and YWETS, were already in place to provide a full range of pre-employment and on-the-job training to those with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below.

24. Mr WONG Kwok-kin enquired about the salary level of university graduates working as interns in local enterprises. He also asked about the nature of business of those participating enterprises, and the posts held by the interns concerned.

25. SLW advised that -

- (a) the average monthly salary offered to university graduates working as interns in local enterprises was \$8,800, and the highest ones were about \$20,000 to \$22,000. Internships with the highest monthly salary offered came from the construction industry;
- (b) the internship opportunities under IPUG were mainly offered by enterprises in the commercial, education services and construction sectors; and

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- (c) university graduates participating in IPUG normally worked as management trainees, marketing assistants or graduate engineers.

26. Noting that an intern on the Mainland was entitled to receive a living allowance of \$3,000 and, depending on circumstances, an accommodation allowance of \$1,500 each month from the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Deputy Chairman enquired about the operational details of IPUG, such as the method of disbursement.

27. In response, C for L advised that -

- (a) the allowances were paid on a reimbursement basis to the designated bank account of the university graduates working as interns on the Mainland;
- (b) given that the primary objective of IPUG was to provide an additional option for university graduates to acquire work experience, the participating tertiary institutions would ensure that the internships would benefit the interns; and
- (c) from operational experience, university graduates were willing to take up worthwhile and useful internships for fostering their career development. The Administration hoped that university graduates would treasure the valuable internship and working opportunities offered under IPUG.

28. Responding to Mr WONG Sing-chi's enquiry about the progress of LD's collaboration with the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund on the promotion of youth employment, C for L advised that seven collaborative projects offering some 2 000 training places had been approved. The approved projects, operated by non-governmental organizations, were in various stages of implementation.

29. Mr CHAN Kin-por considered that the problem of youth unemployment arose from a mismatch between manpower supply and job positions. He cited the situation in the construction industry to illustrate the problem. Although it was anticipated that more job opportunities would be created in the years to come in the construction industry with the Government taking forward various infrastructure projects, it was unlikely that young people would like to join the work force since construction site jobs were often perceived as less favourable in terms of salary offered and working conditions. Mr CHAN held the view that apart from promoting economic development and developing those six industries where Hong Kong enjoyed clear competitive edges, the Administration should focus on reducing the mismatch in overall supply and demand of manpower resources through equipping the youth with the

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necessary skills and experience for taking up professional positions in the six industries.

30. Mr IP Kwok-him opined that YWETS was a useful springboard leading young people to formal employment, since many trainees under the scheme had been able to secure jobs after undergoing on-the-job training. Sharing the concern of Mr CHAN Kin-por over the mismatch in manpower supply and demand particularly in the construction industry, Mr IP considered that elimination of deeply rooted perception would take time and require continuous effort of the Government to change the mindset of young people and enhance their self-esteem, the latter of which was conducive to their personal development and long-term employability.

31. In response, SLW made the following points -

- (a) it was the Government's policy to focus on training and retraining to upgrade the skills of workers in order to reduce the mismatch between job requirements and the qualifications of workers;
- (b) the Administration had been working in close collaboration with various stakeholders, including the Construction Industry Council and the Hong Kong Construction Association, on provision of appropriate training for workers in the construction field. It would continue to discuss the manpower situation in the construction industry with these parties; and
- (c) with the Task Force on Economic Challenges recommending the development of the six industries in which Hong Kong enjoyed clear competitive edges, namely, education services, medical services, testing and certification, environmental industries, innovation and technology, and cultural and creative industries, LD had introduced new courses under YPTP to provide trainees with relevant training in these areas.

III. Thematic survey on the importance of age factor in employment
(LC Paper No. CB(2)523/09-10(05))

32. Referring to paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted with concern that the survey commissioned by the Administration had revealed that age preference, to a large extent, affected the employment opportunities of job seekers looking for elementary occupations. He asked whether the Administration would consider introducing legislation against all forms of age discrimination in employment.

33. C for L responded that notwithstanding the findings provided in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, the survey also indicated that a

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significant 34.8% of the target population accepted that certain occupations had practical need to recruit employees of specific age ranges, and such a need applied to positions of service workers and shop sales workers, followed by such elementary occupations as transportation workers and security guards, and associate professionals.

34. C for L stressed that age might not necessarily be the only consideration of employers in recruiting staff, as many other factors, such as skills, qualifications and work attitude, would also be considered. In addition, age preference in recruitment and age discrimination were two different matters. The Administration considered it more practical to tackle the issue through strengthening publicity and education rather than the enactment of legislation.

35. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan commented that the survey might not be able to reflect the true picture, as the relevant data were collected from persons who had attended interviews, whereas most people facing age discrimination did not even have the opportunity to attend interviews. He said that despite the unrelenting effort of the Administration in promoting equal employment opportunities through education and publicity, age discrimination in employment still existed in Hong Kong. He cited a few airline companies, including British Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways and Hong Kong Dragonair, as examples to illustrate that it was prevalent for the airline industry to practise age discrimination both in recruitment and in compulsory retirement, as flight attendants of these airline companies were forced to retire between the age of 45 and 55. Mr LEE considered that the problem of age discrimination in employment could never be resolved in the absence of an anti-discrimination legislation on age. He urged the Administration to address the problem by introducing the necessary legislation.

36. The Deputy Chairman shared the view that there was a pressing need to put in place anti-discrimination legislation on age in employment, as middle-aged people had increasing difficulty in finding employment in recent years. Referring to paragraphs 11 and 14 of the Administration's paper, he considered that the findings provided therein were not coherent. He considered that the Administration should survey the success rate of people of different age groups in securing a benchmark job.

37. Dr PAN Pey-chyou also expressed concern about the reliability of the survey. He asked about the methodology adopted and measures taken by the Administration to ensure the survey was conducted in a credible manner.

38. Responding to members' concern about the reliability of the survey, C for L and Senior Statistician (Social) 2 advised that -

- (a) to meet the statistical data needs of the Administration to collect the public's views on the importance of age factor in employment, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) commissioned a

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private research company to conduct an independent thematic survey during December 2008 to March 2009. The survey was a territory-wide and comprehensive exercise based on a scientifically designed sampling scheme;

- (b) to ensure a wide coverage of respondents over the territory, the survey comprised three parts, namely a household survey, a survey on employers, and a desk research on recruitment advertisements in 15 local newspapers;
- (c) C&SD had been taking forward the survey in close liaison with the private research company and data users on the survey data requirements. Besides, C&SD played a co-ordination and management role in the survey and was responsible for monitoring the work of the private research company to ensure that the services rendered by the company were up to standard;
- (d) a high response rate was achieved in this large-scale survey, making the findings representative. Specifically, some 8 000 randomly selected households in the territory were successfully enumerated in the household survey. In assessing employers' views on the importance of age factor in employment, a total of some 1 000 employers/persons-in-charge of human resources matters in respect of the establishments randomly selected in the non-government sector were enumerated;
- (e) the findings presented in paragraph 11 of the Administration's paper reflected employers' main consideration in recruitment, while those in paragraph 14 showed their perception of the need to recruit employees of specific age ranges for certain occupations. The findings should thus be exposed to analysis from different perspectives;
- (f) according to the findings of the household survey, when asked about the perceived criteria considered by employers in employment related issues, most of the target population were of the view that the main criterion considered by employers in recruitment was working experience (37.9%), followed by educational, professional qualification and related skills (33.8%). Age (6.4%) only came fifth; and
- (g) the suggestion of surveying the success rate of people of different age groups in securing a benchmark job would imply a considerable increase in sample size and in turn disproportionately significant resource implications. Otherwise, the findings would not be representative.

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39. C for L said that in view of the difficulty faced by aged workers in seeking employment, LD had implemented the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged to strengthen the employment support specifically for people aged 40 or above. The programme was open to all sectors.

40. Mr IP Kwok-him referred to an opinion survey conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2007 whereby a significant 31% of the target population considered the problem of age discrimination in employment serious. He enquired about the measures taken by the Administration to eliminate age discrimination in employment, should it decide not to introduce anti-discrimination legislation on age.

41. C for L responded that the Administration was fully aware of the concern of members about age discrimination in employment. The Labour Advisory Board (LAB) had discussed the issue of legislation against age discrimination in employment for a number of years. When LAB was briefed on the survey findings on 7 December 2009, members of LAB noted that the findings indicated that age was not a major factor in employment. They also noted the practical difficulties associated with legislation and enforcement. As the situation might change over time, members of LAB suggested that the Administration should conduct the survey regularly, say every two to three years, to gauge attitude changes, if any, in the society.

42. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung shared the view that legislating against age discrimination in employment would be the most effective measure to tackle the problem. He further said that the younger generation in the age group of 15 to 19 also faced similar problem and had difficulty in finding employment.

43. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the major barrier encountered by the middle-aged in seeking employment was age discrimination. In his view, it was the responsibility of the Government to foster a cultural change among employers about equal opportunities in employment, and the most effective way to achieve the effect would be the introduction of legislation on age discrimination in employment.

44. C for L responded that in considering whether legislation should be introduced, the Administration had to critically examine whether the introduction of legislation would be the most effective way to achieve the intended purpose, and whether the Administration would be able to enforce the legislation effectively. Given the practical difficulties associated with legislation and enforcement, the Administration considered it more appropriate to focus on public education and publicity at this juncture in tackling age discrimination in employment. The Administration would monitor the situation closely and in the event that public education and publicity were found to be ineffective, the legislative alternative might be considered.

45. The meeting ended at 4:36 pm.

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Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 February 2010