

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1829/06-07
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP/1

Panel on Manpower

Minutes of meeting
held on Thursday, 19 April 2007, at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP (Chairman)
Hon KWONG Chi-kin (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Members attending** : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Public Officers attending** : Item III
Mr TANG Kwok-wai, Paul, JP
Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and
Labour (Labour)
Mrs DO PANG Wai-yee
Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Policy Support and
Strategic Planning)

Miss CHANG Kar-wai, Carrie
Senior Administrative Officer (Policy Support)
Labour Department

Item IV

Mr TANG Kwok-wai, Paul, JP
Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and
Labour (Labour)

Mr NG Ka-kwong, Stanley
Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employees' Rights
and Benefits)

Mr IP Yee-cheung, Ernest
Senior Labour Officer (Labour Inspection Division)
Labour Department

Item V

Mrs Betty FUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Ms Karyn CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower
(Manpower Planning and Training)

Dr Carrie WILLIS
Executive Director
Vocational Training Council

Mrs LO LEE Oi-lin
Deputy Executive Director (Development)
Vocational Training Council

Dr LEE Kin-wang
Head, Estates, Health & Safety Division
Vocational Training Council

**Deputations
by invitation**

: Item III

Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities

Mr Philip YUEN
Secretary General

Ms Deborah WAN
Vice Chairman

New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Ms Deborah WAN
Chief Executive Officer

Mental Health Association of Hong Kong

Mr CHUNG Wai-shing
Chief Officer (Services)

Hong Kong Blind Union

Mr CHENG Tak-wah
Director

Mr NG Kwok-bun

Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong

Mr CHEUNG Kin-fai
Chairperson

Ms LAM Fong-ting
General Secretary

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor
Community Organizer

Cleaning Workers Union

Ms WONG Pui-yan
Organizer

Hong Kong Women Workers' Association

Ms CHAN Po-ying
Committee Member

The Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped
Children

Mrs Julie LEE
Vice Chairperson

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women
Abuse (Kwan Fook)

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairperson

Ms NG Yu

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Sharon TONG
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

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

Miss Helen DIN
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

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I. Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1581/06-07)

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2007 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1580/06-07(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed that the following items be discussed at the next meeting to be held on 17 May 2007 from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm -

- (a) Proposal for introduction of legislation for a minimum wage and related preparatory work;
- (b) Resources Strategy for the Qualifications Framework; and
- (c) Review of the Continuing Education Fund.

(Post-meeting note : Regarding the item referred to in paragraph 2(a) above, the Chairman has, in discussion with the Administration after the meeting, directed that the next meeting would focus on the introduction of statutory minimum wage for cleaning workers and security guards, and deputations would be invited to give views on the subject. Members have been informed of the arrangements on 2 May 2007 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1738/06-07.)

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3. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted that the Administration was studying the feasibility of legislating for paid paternity leave. He requested that a progress report on the study undertaken by the Government be submitted to the Panel. Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and Labour (Labour) (PSL) agreed to report to the Panel the findings of the study at an appropriate time.

III. Proposal for introduction of legislation for a minimum wage and related preparatory work - special arrangement on minimum wage for different categories of people

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1580/06-07(03) to (06) and CB(2)1623/06-07(01))

Views of deputations

Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities / New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1580/06-07(04))

4. Mr Philip YUEN and Ms Deborah WAN presented the views and recommendations of Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities and New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, as detailed in their joint submission. In general, they supported the introduction of legislation for a minimum wage, as it could provide better protection for low-income workers. However, one of their concerns was that the introduction of a statutory minimum wage might adversely affect the job opportunities for people with disabilities, as the disabled persons with comparatively lower productivity would stand the highest chance of being out-competed by other able-bodied persons when a wage floor was in place. In the light of this, Mr YUEN suggested that if legislation on minimum wage was introduced, relaxation should be allowed for people with disabilities. By virtue of the relaxation, a different minimum wage level should be set for the less-competitive disabled employees; and for those whose ability was below the market requirement, they should be exempted from the law protection and be allowed to negotiate their salaries with the employers.

5. Ms Deborah WAN added that to obviate the likelihood that implementation of statutory minimum wage would work to the disadvantage of and cause unemployment among the disabled persons, the Government should develop an objective and simple system for assessing the productivity level of the disabled.

Mental Health Association of Hong Kong

6. Mr CHUNG Wai-shing said that the Mental Health Association of Hong Kong supported the introduction of a statutory minimum wage. Nevertheless, it might have negative effect on social enterprises developed to provide community employment opportunities for the disadvantaged groups (e.g. people with disabilities) as the staff cost involved would be higher following the implementation of statutory minimum wage, thereby affecting the chance

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of bidding government service contracts by social enterprises. In this regard, Mr CHUNG made the following suggestions -

- (a) the Administration should consider awarding government service contracts to rehabilitation non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through restricted tenders, to help strengthen the development of social enterprises and create more community employment opportunities; and
- (b) the Administration should consider providing wage subsidies to the low-income employees working for the social enterprises who were not earning the statutory minimum wage.

Hong Kong Blind Union

7. Mr NG Kwok-bun said that the Hong Kong Blind Union was in support of putting in place a minimum wage system through legislation, as setting of a minimum wage level could ensure a steady monthly income and provide the low-income groups with a greater incentive for work without the need to resort to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). Mr NG pointed out that the Administration's policy on minimum wage was inconsistent, as wage protection was provided to foreign domestic helpers whereas local workers did not have such protection. It was neither appropriate nor desirable for the Administration to defer the introduction of minimum wage on the pretext that it was in contradiction to its policy of non-intervention or it would undermine the flexibility of the labour market.

*Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1580/06-07(05))*

8. Mr CHEUNG Kin-fai said that the Alliance supported the implementation of statutory minimum wage. However, the Alliance shared the worry of the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association about the possibility that the employment opportunities for people with disabilities might be adversely affected, for reasons given in paragraph 4 above. As such, special arrangements on minimum wage, as set out in the submission of the Alliance, were suggested for consideration. Mr CHEUNG hoped that the Administration would conduct periodic review and keep an open mind on suggestions that help promote the employment opportunities of the disabled.

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

9. Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor said that people with disabilities and the unemployed CSSA recipients had difficulties to secure employment. The major reason was that the majority of these people had low education attainment and skill level. Even if they could overcome the difficulties, they very often could only take up lower-paid jobs with a meagre income earning,

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which was inadequate for them to maintain a reasonable living standard. Against this background, the Alliance made the following suggestions -

- (a) to prevent the employers' continual suppression of wages to an unacceptable level, thereby aggravating the burden on the low-income earners, the Administration should implement the minimum wage system across-the-board in all occupations; and
- (b) to create more job opportunities for the more vulnerable social groups, government service contracts should be awarded by restricted tenders and priority should be given to social enterprises established/operated by NGOs which employed people with disabilities and/or CSSA recipients who participated in Social Welfare Department (SWD)'s Support for Self-reliance Scheme. For open tender exercises where a marking scheme was adopted, tenderers should be given bonus scores if they employed people with disabilities and CSSA recipients.

Cleaning Workers' Union

10. Ms WONG Pui-yan said that the Cleaning Workers' Union was in favour of legislation on minimum wage. The Union was particularly concerned about assisting the disabled to secure employment, and made the following suggestions -

- (a) the Administration should put in place a quota system for employing people with disabilities;
- (b) for those disabled persons whose working capacity was not as high as able-bodied workers, the Administration should provide them with appropriate vocational training; and
- (c) as some deputations had advocated an assessment system to gauge the productivity level of the disabled, the Administration should take the matter into careful and thorough consideration.

Ms WONG further said that if a minimum wage was introduced across-the-board, disabled employees of social enterprises should not be exempted from the coverage of a legal wage requirement to avoid abuse of the exemption provision.

*Hong Kong Women Workers Association
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1652/06-07(01))*

11. Ms CHAN Po-ying presented the views of the Hong Kong Women Workers Association, as detailed in its submission which was tabled at the meeting. Ms CHAN highlighted the following -

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- (a) age discrimination was a common problem to many middle-aged female workers, which had resulted in unemployment and wages suppression;
- (b) to protect employees' interests, the level of statutory minimum wage must be set above the poverty line, adequate for the workers and their families to maintain a decent living; and
- (c) the Administration should provide more support to assist NGOs to operate social enterprises on a sustainable basis by award of restricted tenders or introduction of tax concessions.

(Post-meeting note : The submission, tabled at the meeting, was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1652/06-07(01) on 20 April 2007.)

*The Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1623/06-07(01))*

12. Mrs Julie LEE presented the views of the Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children, as detailed in its submission. Mrs LEE pointed out that in the absence of protection under a quota system for the employment of people with disabilities, implementation of statutory minimum wage would have great impact on the employment opportunities of the mentally disabled. Despite that, the Association was in support of the proposal to put in place legislation for a minimum wage, as it was considered in the general interests of all workers. Mrs LEE hoped that special arrangements could be made when minimum wage was introduced, taking into account the needs of the disabled in every area.

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook)

13. Ms NG Yu and Ms LIU Ngan-fung said that a large number of middle-aged female workers, having low education attainment and skill level, were engaged in low-income occupations, such as security guards and domestic helpers who were required to work excessively long hours. They requested that -

- (a) the Administration should introduce legislation against age discrimination in recruitment as soon as possible;
- (b) employers should be encouraged to adopt a flexi-hour work system; and
- (c) the Government should strengthen its employment services, e.g. the Job Matching Programmes, and actively offer vocational training and retraining programmes for female job seekers having difficulties in finding employment.

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Discussion

14. PSL gave the following response to the views and concerns expressed by the deputations -

- (a) the Administration was aware of deputations' concerns about the potential pitfalls (e.g. impact on the employment opportunities of the disabled) if legislation on minimum wage was introduced. The issues raised and suggestions made by deputations at the meeting would be carefully considered;
- (b) according to the work plan of the Administration, it would take forward, between now and October 2008, the preparatory work to be undertaken for introducing a statutory minimum wage for the cleansing and guarding services sectors. The issue of whether and if so, what special measures should be introduced for the vulnerable groups (such as people with disabilities) would be addressed in such context;
- (c) in connection with the preparatory work referred to in paragraph (b), the Administration would study the issue further taking into account overseas experiences. The Administration planned to conduct an overseas study visit to Australia for the purpose of understanding its experience in making provisions for people with disabilities under a statutory minimum wage; and
- (d) the Labour Department (LD) and SWD had been working closely with NGOs in creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities and would continue to do so in the future. In addition, SWD had been providing assistance to NGOs in setting up social enterprises to provide employment for people with disabilities and a number of NGOs had successfully bid for government service contracts through restricted tenders.

15. Miss CHAN Yuen-han noted that deputations in general supported the proposal to legislate for a minimum wage. She considered that the Administration should respond to the views and recommendations of deputations proactively, and proceed with the introduction of minimum wage legislation without delay.

16. Regarding a recommendation made by the Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities that the less-competitive disabled employees should be exempted from the coverage of wage requirement and be allowed to negotiate their salaries with the employers, Ms LI Fung-ying expressed concern whether it would defeat the purpose of implementing a statutory minimum wage. Mr Philip YUEN explained that the proposal to pave way for competency assessment and downward adjustment of minimum wage level by 30% for people with disabilities with lower productivity was meant to create or enhance

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employment opportunities for these people.

17. Regarding the overseas study visit to be conducted by the Administration, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan and Ms LI Fung-ying asked about the timetable and details of the study.

18. PSL responded that a visit to Australia would be conducted in Autumn 2007 to acquire first-hand information about its experience in implementing a statutory minimum wage in particular, the arrangement with regard to people with disabilities.

19. Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG said that as deputations attending the meeting had clearly expressed support for the introduction of statutory minimum wage and forwarded their views and recommendations on what and how special arrangements should be made for the more vulnerable groups, the Administration should provide the Panel with a written response to issues raised by deputations attending the meeting as soon as possible. Dr CHEUNG suggested that the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat could be requested to conduct a research study on the experience and practices of overseas economies in implementing their minimum wage systems.

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20. PSL reiterated that all the views received would be carefully considered taking into account overseas experiences and the Administration would respond at a later stage after it had fully studied the matter.

21. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Administration had the responsibility to ensure that all working members could benefit from the introduction of legislation on minimum wages. In his view, the statutory minimum wages must be fixed at a level sufficient to cover the basic cost of living of workers and their dependent family members.

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22. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that to his knowledge, the rehabilitation and medial social services sector had conducted research and produced reports on minimum wages systems implemented by overseas economies. As detailed research reports were readily available, he enquired whether the Administration should dispense with its plan to undertake an overseas visit to Australia in this autumn, but make reference to the reports to complete its study on the subject. Mr LEE also asked whether the intent to make special arrangements for the more vulnerable groups if a statutory minimum wage was introduced would constitute discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance. He suggested that the Administration should consult the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on the issue and revert to the Panel.

23. PSL responded that -

- (a) the proposed visit to be conducted in Autumn 2007 could help obtain first-hand and updated information on the Australian

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experience in making provisions for people with disabilities under a minimum wage system; and

- (b) regarding the issue of whether exempting some categories of employees from a statutory wage system would amount to discrimination, EOC would be duly consulted.

24. Mr Alan LEONG recalled that RLSD of the LegCo Secretariat had compiled a research report on "Minimum Wage Systems" in May 1999. The RLSD report contained information on the experience and practices of a number of overseas economies, such as Australia, Japan and Taiwan, in implementing their minimum wage systems, covering such aspects as historical development and evolution, enforcement mechanism, social and economic impact assessment, etc. He held the view that the research report could serve as a starting point for further studies and discussion.

25. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung pointed out that a case concerning minimum wage was pending in court. He cautioned that the court ruling might have impact on the proposal to legislate for a minimum wage, and queried whether the Administration had any action plan to meet such an urgent need, if the Government lost the case. Mr LEUNG criticised the Administration for delaying the introduction of legislation on minimum wage by launching WPM and conducting overseas visit. He strongly requested that the Administration should start drafting a bill on minimum wage without further delay, and hoped that scrutiny of the bill could be completed within the current term of LegCo.

26. PSL reiterated that the Administration had no intention of procrastinating, and sufficient time should be allowed for WPM to be fully tested. Hence, the Administration would continue to strenuously promote WPM and closely monitor its progress in the next 20 months through the mid-term review and overall review to be conducted respectively in October 2007 and 2008.

27. Miss CHAN Yuen-han and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remained of the view that WPM was a tactic to delay legislating for a minimum wage as the Administration would only consider the need for legislation for the cleansing and guarding services sectors in October 2008, pending the outcome of the review. Mr LEUNG commented that instead of resolving conflicts and promoting social harmony, WPM would create inequality between people in the low-income group since the minimum wage requirement was only applied to the cleansing and guarding services sectors, but not to other low-income occupations.

28. PSL reiterated that the Administration had no intention of procrastinating and the Administration would, as a matter of priority, aim at achieving wage protection for workers in the cleansing and guarding services sectors.

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29. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern how the Administration would evaluate and what performance indicators would be adopted for assessing the overall effectiveness of the WPM. He hoped that the details of the evaluation system could be made available for consideration by the Panel as soon as possible. PSL said that the Labour Advisory Board (LAB), which was responsible for monitoring WPM, had already started the discussion on how to conduct the mid-term review. The Administration expected that LAB could complete its deliberation in the next few months and would revert to the Panel after the summer on the details.

30. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan sought clarification whether the Administration could provide the following information as requested by the Panel at previous meetings by the agreed deadlines -

- (a) the criteria and mechanism to be adopted for assessing the effectiveness of WPM in the second quarter of the year; and
- (b) the participating entities (such as the name, nature and number of enterprises/organisations participating in WPM, and the number of cleaners and security guards employed by them) by the end of April 2007.

31. PSL replied that the Administration would report the deliberation of LAB to the Panel on the mid-term review in September/October 2007. Regarding the information about the participants as referred to in paragraph 30(b) above, it would be ready in late April/early May. The Chairman expressed concern about the revised timing for reporting to the Panel the assessment criteria and mechanism, as against the original one. He urged the Administration to closely monitor the work of LAB.

32. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked whether there had been a marked increase in the number of enterprises/owners' corporations (OCs) participating in WPM in the past few weeks. PSL said that as at 19 April 2007, about 900 enterprises/organisations from a wide cross-section of the business community and 20 OCs had already pledged their support for WPM.

IV. Progress report on measures taken by the Labour Department to combat illegal employment

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1580/06-07(07))

33. PSL briefed members on the progress of measures taken by LD to combat illegal employment, as set out in the Administration's paper.

34. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern about the effectiveness of measures taken by the Administration to combat illegal employment. Regarding sentencing, Mr LEE asked about the respective number of employers convicted of employing illegal workers and sentenced to

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imprisonment in 2006.

35. PSL said that in 2006, a total of 985 employers suspected of employing illegal workers were arrested. Among them, 333 were prosecuted and 274 convicted. 39.4% of these employers were sentenced to immediate imprisonment upon conviction. The longest term of imprisonment was nine months.

36. Noting that not all the employers convicted of illegal employment were sentenced to imprisonment, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked about the reason for it. He expressed concern whether difficulties were encountered in taking out prosecution against the suspected employers. In his view, the court should impose heavier penalties on employers taking on illegal workers in order to achieve the desired deterrent effect.

37. Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employees' Rights and Benefits) (AC for L) gave the following response -

- (a) Labour Inspectors (LIs) of LD were authorised under section 17L of the Immigration Ordinance to check the employee records maintained by employers and the proof of identity carried by employees during workplace inspections. While LIs were not empowered to arrest, detain and prosecute illegal workers and their employers, any suspected cases of illegal employment detected during the workplace inspections were therefore referred to the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and the Immigration Department (ImmD) for further investigation and prosecution;
- (b) with regard to sentencing of employers of illegal workers, the Court of Appeal had laid down a sentencing guideline which prescribed that, in the absence of any aggravating or mitigating circumstances, a first time offender who employed illegal workers should be liable to immediate custodial sentence of three months; and
- (c) the courts had been imposing heavier sentences on illegal workers and their employers in recent years. In 2006, the longest term of imprisonment on employers and employees engaged in illegal employment activities were respectively nine and 20 months.

38. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern why the sentences imposed on illegal workers were heavier than offending employers. Regarding the enforcement action against visitors engaged in unlawful employment after entry, Mr LEE was of the view that they should be repatriated immediately to their country of origin upon conviction.

39. AC for L said that there were sentencing guidelines in respect of illegal

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employment. For persons convicted of illegal stay in Hong Kong, the sentencing guideline was 15 months' imprisonment and for visitors taking up illegal employment in Hong Kong, there was no sentencing guideline and the sentence was usually two to three months' imprisonment. As for employers who were convicted of employing persons not lawfully employable, the sentencing guideline was three months' imprisonment.

40. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that despite of the increase in workplace inspections conducted by LD and joint operations with other enforcement authorities in the past four years, the problem of illegal employment continued to prevail. This was evidenced by the fact that the number of illegal workers and their employers detected over the years remained at broadly the same level without significant improvement. Mr LEUNG expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the measures taken by the Administration to curb illegal employment. He enquired whether the Administration had analysed the distribution of illegal workers arrested, in terms of the types of jobs undertaken by them so as to formulate more effective measures to combat and suppress illegal employment at source.

41. PSL said that the Administration had endeavoured to tackle the problem at source. Since mid-2003, LD had adjusted its enforcement strategy by placing increasing emphasis on mounting targeted operations with HKPF and ImmD to raid workplaces with suspected illegal employment activities. During the joint operations, the police/immigration officers arrested the illegal workers and their employers on the spot. The outcomes of these operations were widely publicised by the media. PSL said that these joint operations had proved to be effective and they had sent a clear message that the Government was determined to clamp down on illegal employment. Apart from enforcement, LD had also targeted employers in its publicity against illegal employment. PSL said that there had been a general trend of decreasing number of cases in the last two years.

42. AC for L and Senior Labour Officer (Labour Inspection Division) supplemented that –

- (a) to tackle the problem at source, ImmD had, on another front, stepped up enforcement actions against illegal employment. In 2006, more than 9 000 operations were conducted by ImmD to deter employers from hiring illegal workers. ImmD, HKPF and LD had also strengthened cooperation in conducting more operations. The vigorous enforcement had created strong deterrent effect and the number of illegal workers and employers arrested in 2006 had dropped. In addition, ImmD continued to exercise stringent controls at various immigration control points to intercept illegal immigrants and to identify dubious visitors so as to prevent people who might become illegal workers from entering Hong Kong; and

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- (b) the LD's records indicated that the kinds of jobs taken up by illegal workers were mostly of unskilled nature, including renovation workers and workers in food establishments, retail shops and personal service trades.

V. Construction of a new campus for Vocational Training Council at Tiu Keng Leng, Tseng Kwan O
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1580/06-07(08))

43. With the aid of powerpoint, Deputy Executive Director (Development) of the Vocational Training Council briefed members on the proposal to construct a new campus for Vocational Training Council (VTC) at Tiu Keng Leng, Tseung Kwan O to accommodate the new Hong Kong Design Institute, which would bring together three design-related departments currently scattered in five campuses of the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE), and to re-provision the existing campus of the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee) located at Kowloon Tong.

44. Mr SIN Chung-kai expressed support for VTC's proposal to construct a new campus at Tiu Keng Leng. He was concerned how space and facilities to be vacated from the design-related departments in the existing IVE campuses would be used, following the completion of the new campus at Tiu Keng Leng.

45. Executive Director of the Vocational Training Council (ED/VTC) responded that due to site constraints, the current open space provision of five square metres per student was below VTC's original planning standard of seven square metres per student. In the light of this, the space to be vacated would be re-allocated to relieve overcrowding and improve the quality of the learning environment for the students.

46. Mr SIN Chung-kai expressed concern that students, particularly for those living in remote areas, had to travel a long way to the new campus at Tiu Keng Leng to attend school. He suggested that VTC should consider providing hostel accommodation for its students. ED/VTC said that the suggestion would be carefully considered, having regard to availability of resources and space.

47. Mr SIN Chung-kai enquired whether the Administration would review its existing policy on the provision of hostel places and consider allocating funds to VTC for providing hostel accommodation. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower replied that under the prevailing policy, hostel accommodation would be provided for students studying degree programmes offered by University Grants Committee-funded institutions. The suggestion of Mr SIN to provide hostels for sub-degree students would have far-reaching implications and require careful deliberations.

48. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed full support for the project. Noting that the space vacated from the design-related departments in the existing IVE campuses would be re-allocated to relieve overcrowding, Mr LEE enquired

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whether the open space provision for students in IVE could be greatly improved upon the completion of the new campus at Tiu Keng Leng.

49. ED/VTC responded that the re-provisioning of the designed-related departments could make way for improvement in space provision per student. Although the projected open space provision of six and a half square metres per student still fell short of the planning parameter of seven square metres, the increase was as much as one and a half square metres, representing a significant improvement.

50. In conclusion, the Chairman said that members supported the proposal to construct the new campus for VTC.

VI. Any other business

51. The Chairman referred members to a letter dated 19 April 2007 from Miss CHAN Yuen-han, which was tabled at the meeting, suggesting that consideration should be given for the Panel to undertake an overseas duty visit to the United Kingdom and France during the summer recess to study their experience in implementing statutory minimum wage.

(Post-meeting note : The letter from Miss CHAN, tabled at the meeting, was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1658/06-07(01) on 20 April 2007.)

52. Members supported the proposal to undertake an overseas visit during the summer recess. The Chairman said that further details of the proposed visit would be considered at the next Panel meeting.

53. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:05 pm.