

**For information  
on 7 February 2014**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
HOUSE COMMITTEE**

**Population Policy Public Engagement Exercise**

**INTRODUCTION**

This brief informs Members of the key engagement activities conducted and the major views received so far since the launch of the public engagement exercise on population policy on 24 October 2013. It also highlights the initiatives in the 2014 Policy Address which are relevant to population policy.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) released a consultation document on 24 October 2013 and launched a four-month public engagement exercise. The consultation document sets out the key facts and figures, identifies and explores the main issues and puts forth open-ended questions to gauge public views on broad policy directions and feasible measures. On 8 November 2013, the Chief Secretary for Administration, Chairman of the SCPP, briefed this Council on the consultation document.

**ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

3. By the end of January 2014, SCPP and its Secretariat held the following engagement activities to gather views –

- (a) briefings for 18 District Councils or their committees;
- (b) three public forums targeting members of the public;
- (c) eight focus group meetings to collect views from stakeholders, experts and think tanks;
- (d) consultative sessions with government advisory bodies including, the Elderly Commission, Women's Commission, Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Manpower Development Committee, Family Council, Labour Advisory Board, Industry Training Advisory Committees,

Commission on Youth, Heads of Universities Committee, Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education and International Business Committee; and

- (e) consultative sessions / forums with stakeholders including chambers of commerce, professional bodies, political parties, non-governmental organisations, concern groups, school sector and higher / further education sector.

## **MAJOR VIEWS RECEIVED**

4. By the end of January, the SSCP Secretariat has received over 800 submissions (including views relayed through hotline). The Social Sciences Research Centre of the University of Hong Kong has been commissioned to conduct independent analysis on the views received. It is expected that the report on the findings and analysis of the views received will be available in the second quarter of 2014.

5. The major views collected thus far are set out below.

### **Population Policy Objective**

6. Some respondents welcomed the policy objective which underlines the need to drive Hong Kong's economic development, without losing sight of the importance to building a socially inclusive society. On the other hand, others considered that the consultation document has put too much emphasis on economic growth and manpower development, while little has been said as to how to improve the quality of life of Hong Kong people. Questions were raised on whether Hong Kong should set an upper limit for population having regard to our land and infrastructural constraints. Some were concerned that unlimited population growth would be at the expense of our quality of life. On the other hand, some suggested Hong Kong adopt an aggressive target of expanding its population to a size comparable to other cosmopolitan cities. Some considered that we should determine an optimal size and mix for Hong Kong's population.

### **Our Economic Base**

7. Most shared the need for broadening our economic base to provide new growth areas while increasing job diversity for our young people. Noting that much has been said about economic restructuring over the years but with little result, some considered that the key is implementation. Some considered that it may be difficult for Hong Kong to follow the overseas experience for Government to assume a leading role in spearheading economic changes because

of community concerns on “picking winners” and “collusion between Government and business”.

### **Encouraging Female Homemakers to Work**

8. Many were supportive of encouraging female homemakers to work or re-join the labour force. Quality, affordable and accessible childcare services and afterschool care services were considered the key to enabling mothers with young children to go to work. From the perspective of encouraging women employment, some saw the need for more formal and professional child care services. We also received views that making more part-time jobs available, job-sharing and home office arrangement would also be helpful in retaining women in employment. As these flexible workplace arrangements would increase employers’ operating costs, some suggested that the Government provide financial incentives for the business sector to facilitate changes to take root at quicker pace and on a larger scale.

9. Some, on the other hand, expressed concerns that such a strategy might impact on family solidarity and parenting. The Government should focus its efforts in removing possible barriers that prevent female homemakers to rejoin the workforce. The choice to work or not should be for the female homemakers. Taking care of children and family should be perceived positively as contributions to society.

### **Extending the Working Life of Mature Workers**

10. The majority of the views received were supportive to extending the working life of mature workers for reasons including better utilising the elderly resources and transfer of knowledge to young members in the corporations, etc. Most shared the need for flexibility, i.e. working beyond normal retirement age should be voluntary to both employees and employers. In order not to block the progression pathway of young people, some suggested mature workers be re-employed in different positions with lower pay such as part-time consultants or advisors. More flexible employment practices of such kind would also help mature workers transit from work to full retirement. Some considered that increased remuneration of mature workers (as over young people) and age discrimination may be hindering factors in the employment of mature workers. Considering that deferring the civil service retirement age may promote catalytic changes in other sectors, many of the views we received considered it important for the Government to take the lead in extending the working life of mature workers.

## **Education**

11. Many agreed that education is the core element in population policy. Some suggested that more undergraduate places should be provided in order to support Hong Kong's economic development. But some were concerned whether our job market could provide enough quality jobs for graduates with degree qualifications. Some considered that the self-financing sub-degree sector should undergo a process of consolidation. To help our young people acquire skills needed by our economy, there should be greater collaboration between institutions and industries in the design of post-secondary programmes and integration of workplace attachment with learning in institutions.

12. There was general consensus on the need to inspire interest and instil a change in mindset in relation to vocational education among young people and their parents. This was particularly so in face of manpower shortage and lack of new bloods in certain industries. Suggested measures received include introduction of vocational education in junior secondary stage, early streaming of secondary students, strengthening career counselling in schools, closer collaboration with trades/industries to introduce to students the various professions and occupations, re-building the image of vocational education, improving the image of blue-collar jobs, and developing licensing systems that provide clear career progression pathways.

## **Attracting Outside Talents**

13. Many supported the policy direction for attracting outside talents to maintain Hong Kong's competitive edge as an international city. Some agreed that to better attract talent with the skills conducive to Hong Kong's development, Hong Kong should develop its skills shortage list to complement the existing talent admission schemes such as the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme. Others considered that schemes such as the General Employment Policy are essentially market-driven and have served Hong Kong well. Most views considered that Hong Kong should continue to improve in areas such as air quality and provision of international school places in order to attract overseas and Mainland talent. Some, however, cautioned that given our development constraints on land, housing, etc, a large influx of talent may be problematic. Diversification of the economic base, relaxing regime on recognition of overseas professional qualifications (particularly the medical sector) and more facilitating immigration measures for the return of the second generation of Hong Kong emigrants would also help attract talent to Hong Kong.

## **Labour Importation**

14. The majority considered that local workers should be given priority in filling job vacancies. Diverse views were received as to the extent labour importation should be used to meet local manpower shortage. Views from some industries, chambers of commerce and individuals saw importation of labour as a flexible solution to meet the manpower shortage and to maintain the quality of public services (such as elderly home services and construction services). Concerns were expressed that the time for processing applications under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) was too long. Some maintained there was scope to make the existing application arrangements more accommodating to the special need of the construction industry (for example, at present construction contractors can only submit an SLS application after they have been awarded the construction contracts). Trade unions and employee representatives, on the other hand, were concerned that relaxation of the current arrangement would affect the job opportunities and wage level of local workers. They considered that improving pay levels, working conditions and work safety are means to attract new blood to join the industries.

## **Encouraging Childbearing**

15. Most of the views received agreed to the approach of fostering a supportive environment for people to form and raise families. Among the suggestions on measures to foster a family-friendly environment, the more commonly cited ones include extending the length of maternity leave and raising the payment level during maternity leave, provision of paternity leave, providing more support to working mothers for breastfeeding (e.g. provision of nursing room in workplace), and provision of quality and accessible childcare services. Some considered that one-off subsidy or allowance would be of limited effect.

## **Active Ageing**

16. Some considered that an elderly-friendly living environment is not only about “hardware” (such as barrier-free facilities) but should also include “software” (such as what kind of support measures are required to help the elderly lead a happy retirement life in the community). Some also saw the need for promoting the development of a silver hair market to better serve the elderly of the next generations and to boost Hong Kong’s economy.

## **New Arrivals**

17. Notwithstanding the Government’s explanation that the One-way Permit (OWP) Scheme is operated in accordance with the requirements under the

Basic Law and that its primary objective is for family reunion, there were views calling for changes to the OWP Scheme, including the suggestions of imposing additional screening criteria, reduction of daily quota, etc. On the other hand, views were expressed that more should be done to help the new arrivals better integrate into the community through for example employment.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

18. Some considered that the Government, in collaboration with the public organisations, the private sector and the rehabilitation sector, should continue to enhance the support and incentive measures for persons with disabilities and employers with a view to creating more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, thereby unleashing the potential of persons with disabilities and helping them become valuable social capital.

### **2014 POLICY ADDRESS**

19. Formulation of a comprehensive population policy is one of the pledges made by the Chief Executive in his Election Manifesto. In the 2014 Policy Address which was prepared in tandem with the public engagement exercise, we have put forward some policy initiatives in response to the views expressed in the public engagement exercise. The initiatives in the Policy Address relevant to the population policy are recapped below.

20. To unleash the potential of the local population -

- (a) conducting study on women's employment, improving after-school care services provided by non-governmental organisations and extending the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (paragraphs 88-89 of 2014 Policy Address);
- (b) enhancing services for Persons with Disabilities and supporting students with special educational needs (paragraphs 80-82);
- (c) enhancing school-based support service for kindergartens admitting ethnic minority (EM) children; supporting EM students in learning Chinese language as a second language; developing vocational Chinese language course; and strengthening community support to EMs (paragraphs 74-79); and
- (d) strengthening school-based after-school learning and support (paragraph 110).

21. To enhance the quality of our home-grown talent –
  - (a) increasing the opportunities for receiving higher education (paragraph 96);
  - (b) mapping out strategy to promote vocational education in the community; strengthening life planning; integrating vocational education with employment support (paragraphs 101-107); and
  - (c) providing long-term support for the development of Qualifications Framework (paragraph 108).
  
22. To promote active ageing and facilitate elderly people who choose to retire on the Mainland –
  - (a) purchasing residential care places from an elderly home on the Mainland (paragraph 67); and
  - (b) injecting new money into the Elder Academy Development Foundation to sustain the development of elder academies, and extending the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities in phases to include green minibuses (paragraph 73).

## **NEXT STEP**

23. The public engagement exercise will run till 23 February 2014. On the basis of the initiatives covered in the 2014 Policy Address and views received, the SCPP will formulate an actionable agenda with specific measures in the latter half of 2014.

**Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Population Policy  
Policy and Project Coordination Unit  
Chief Secretary of Administration's Office  
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