

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)961/13-14
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 17 December 2013, at 3:30 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan (Chairman)
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon CHAN Kin-por, BBS, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon KWOK Wai-keung
Hon SIN Chung-kai, SBS, JP
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon TANG Ka-piu
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, JP
Hon CHUNG Kwok-pan
- Member attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP

Public Officers : Item III
attending

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

Mr CHEUK Wing-hing, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Mrs Tonia LEUNG SO Suk-ching, JP
Assistant Commissioner for Labour
(Employment Services)

Item IV

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

Mr CHEUK Wing-hing, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Miss Mabel LI Po-yi, JP
Assistant Commissioner for Labour
(Development)

Item V

Mr David LEUNG, JP
Deputy Commissioner for Labour
(Occupational Safety and Health)

Dr Raymond LEUNG Lai-man, JP
Occupational Health Consultant
Labour Department

Mr LI Chi-leung
Assistant Commissioner for Labour
(Occupational Safety)

**Attendance
by invitation** : Item III

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Mr WONG Hak-lim
Vice-President

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and
Progress of Hong Kong

Mr CHEUNG Tak-wai
Community Organizer

The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions
(Rights & Benefits Committee)

Mr LO Chung-yeung
Secretary

The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon
Labour Unions

Mr CHAN Man Luen-ying
Organizer

Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral
Centre for Workers (NT)

Mr Augustine YU Siu-po
Acting Centre Supervisor

Concern Public Transportation Affairs Alliance

Ms Venny KWOK
Convener

Smart & Beauty House

Mr CHOW King
Member

Northern District Employment Concern Group

Mr Simon TAM
Member

Community Development Alliance (Tin Shui Wai
Community Development Project)

Mr Thomas KONG
Social Worker

The Lion Rock Institute

Miss Samantha Denford
Research Assistant

Liberal Party

Mr Peter SIU

Item IV

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and
Progress of Hong Kong

Mr CHEUNG Tak-wai
Community Organizer

Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral
Centre for Workers (Kowloon)

Mr LI Ka-shu
Program Officer

Kwai Chung Community Workers' Union

Miss Vincci WONG
Representative

Kwai Chung Estate Labour Rights Concern Group

Ms HO Kam-yi
Representative

Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre

Miss LEUNG Ching-shan
Representative

Democratic Party

Mr Ricky OR Yiu-lam
Central Committee Member

爭取低收入家庭保障聯席

Mr LEE Kwok-kuen
Community Organizer

The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions
(Rights & Benefits Committee)

Mr YUEN Cheung-fung
Member

The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon
Labour Unions

Miss TAM Kam-lin
Deputy Director of Social Affairs Committee

關注婦女零散工小組

Ms CHENG Kiu-yung
Member

Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral
Centre for Workers (NT)

Mr Augustine YU Siu-po
Acting Centre Supervisor

Concern Public Transportation Affairs Alliance

Ms Venny KWOK
Convener

Smart & Beauty House

Mr CHOW King
Member

Northern District Employment Concern Group

Mr Simon TAM
Member

Community Development Alliance (Tin Shui Wai
Community Development Project)

Mr Thomas KONG
Social Worker

Public Housing Concern Group for Ethnic Minorities

Miss Sairah Abbas
Assistant Programme Officer

Labour Party

Mr KEUNG Kwok-wai
Community Organizer

New People's Party

Mr KAM Man-fung
Central Committee Member

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

Staff in attendance : Ms Rita LAI
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Ms Kiwi NG
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

Miss Lulu YEUNG
Clerical Assistant (2) 1

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)491/13-14(01) and (02))

Regular meeting in January 2014

2. Members agreed that the next regular meeting originally scheduled for Tuesday, 21 January 2014 would be rescheduled for Monday, 27 January 2014, at 8:30 am to receive briefings by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") and the Secretary for Education on the relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2014 Policy Address.

Items for discussion at future meetings

Offsetting arrangement for severance payment and long service payment under the Employment Ordinance ("EO")

3. The Chairman informed members that the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office had provided a response to the Panel's enquiry about the delineation of responsibilities within the Administration on the existing arrangement of allowing employers to use the Mandatory Provident Fund ("MPF") accrued benefits from their contributions to offset the severance payments and the long service payments under EO. It was stated that the MPF Schemes Ordinance was under the policy purview of the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") was responsible for safeguarding employees' statutory entitlement for severance payment and long service payment under EO. The issue would be handled jointly by the two bureaux, and both of them would attend discussions of the matter at future Panel meetings. The Chairman said that a joint meeting of the Panel with the Panel on Financial Affairs would be arranged in around February/March 2014 to discuss the issue.

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Legislative proposal on compulsory reinstatement and re-engagement

4. The Chairman further informed members that the Judiciary and the Administration had responded to the Panel's concern about the timing for introduction of the legislative proposal to provide for the Labour Tribunal/the Court to make a compulsory reinstatement and re-engagement order in cases of unreasonable and unlawful dismissal. According to the Administration, the legislative proposal contained a number of new elements, which carried implications on certain legal principles and court procedures. It had been striving to sort them out with a view to finalising it for introduction into the Legislative Council ("LegCo") at the earliest possible time.

Protection of employees' rights and benefits of foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs")

5. Referring members to the letter dated 27 November 2013 from Dr Fernando CHEUNG proposing the Panel to discuss issues relating to the protection of employees' rights and benefits of FDHs, the Chairman advised that issues relating to employment conditions for FDHs was currently placed in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion. Dr CHEUNG's proposal would be incorporated in this item as appropriate.

Importation of labour for residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs")

6. Referring members to a letter dated 13 December 2013 from Mr TANG Ka-piu proposing the Panel to hold a joint meeting with the Panel on Welfare Services ("WS Panel") to discuss issues relating to importation of labour under the Supplementary Labour Scheme ("SLS") for RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme, the Chairman advised that he would discuss the proposal with the Chairman of the WS Panel after the meeting.

Youth employment

7. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the Panel would discuss and receive deputations' views on youth employment, as proposed by Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung in his letter dated 28 November 2013, at the Panel's regular meeting in February 2014.

(Post-meeting note: The above-mentioned letters were issued to members vide LC Paper Nos. CB(2)555/13-14(01) to (06) on 20 December 2013.)

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III. Extending retirement age and employment for the middle-aged
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)487/13-14(01) and CB(2)491/13-14(03))

8. At the invitation of the Chairman, SLW briefed members on the issue of retirement age and the support measures taken by the Government to help middle-aged persons secure employment as detailed in the Administration's paper.

9. Members noted the background brief entitled "Middle-aged employment and extension of working life" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Views of deputations

10. At the invitation of the Chairman, 11 deputations presented their views on the subject. A summary of the views of the deputations is in **Annex I**.

11. Members noted that the following three organisations not attending the meeting had provided the Panel with written submissions -

- (a) HKSAR Government Employees General Union;
- (b) Civil Servants & Subsidized Organizations Committee, The Federation of Hong Kong & Kowloon Labour Unions; and
- (c) Manpower Concern Group.

Discussion

Extending retirement age

12. Mr CHAN Kin-por said that he was in support of extending the retirement age of employees, having regard to the better health, higher education levels and rich experience among the current and future elderly generations. Yet, it needed to strike a balance of not hindering the career aspiration of younger generations when promoting a longer working life. Mr CHAN further said that the Administration should take the lead in promoting a longer working life in the civil service.

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13. SLW said that the Administration shared the observation of Mr CHAN Kin-por that in considering the issue of extending the retirement age, there was a need to maintain a balance between extending the working life and not hindering the career prospects of younger generations.

14. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung was concerned that although the normal retirement age was 60, the elderly would be eligible for welfare benefits and subsidised services for the elderly only when they reached the age of 65. The Administration should address the specific needs of the elderly aged between 60 and 65. Mr LEUNG further expressed the view that the impact of extending the working life on the career prospects of younger generations would be moderate.

Labour Force

15. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted from the figures shown in Appendix 2 to the Administration's paper that in 2012, there was a total of some 548 500 economically inactive persons aged 50 to 64 (excluding FDHs) under the categories of engagement in household duties and retirement/old age. Mr WONG held the view that the major reasons for these people staying out of the labour force were attributed to the lack of appropriate support from the Government, such as provision of appropriate training. Given the sizeable potential workforce, he enquired about the Administration's measures to attract these people to enter or re-join the labour market. Mr WONG added that the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions objected to expanding the importation of labour under SLS to relieve the labour shortage problem in certain industries as urged by the business sector. He further sought clarification on the Administration's stance on the issue.

16. SLW responded that the Administration was committed to unleashing the potential labour force in the existing population. He referred members to the survey findings of a Special Topic Enquiry on "Desire of economically inactive persons for taking up jobs if being offered suitable employment" conducted by the Census and Statistics Department ("C&SD") between April and June 2011, which revealed that around 13 200 early retirees aged 50 to 64 indicated that they would be willing to work if offered suitable employment, representing about 5% of the total number of early retirees in that age group. For female home-makers aged 30 to 59, around 8% of them would be willing to work if offered suitable employment. SLW stressed that the Government's

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policy was to ensure priority of employment for local workers. The Administration would only consider importing workers from outside Hong Kong when the local workforce was insufficient to support the development needs.

17. Mr CHUNG Kwok-pan pointed out that some industries were in face of an acute labour shortage problem. Notably, the majority of the high-risk jobs involving explosion and tunnelling works in the construction industry were currently undertaken by non-local workers in the light of the local workers' reluctance to perform such dangerous tasks. He urged the Administration to actively consider allowing importing more labour from outside Hong Kong.

Employment services and support

18. Mr KWOK Wai-keung expressed concern about the effectiveness of the employment services for job seekers. Noting that there were 22 166 job seekers aged 40 or above registering for the Labour Department ("LD")'s employment services in the first 10 months of 2013 and that only 2 033 placements of middle-aged job seekers were recorded under the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("EPM") in the same period, Mr KWOK asked about the reasons for the low successful rate for EPM.

19. Mr KWOK Wai-keung and Mr POON Siu-ping were concerned about the participation rate of EPM. Mr POON enquired about the reasons for the decrease in the number of placements under EPM from some 9 700 in 2006 to 2 033 in the first 10 months of 2013, and asked whether a review would be conducted to assess the effectiveness of EPM in encouraging middle-aged employment.

20. Commissioner for Labour ("C for L") and Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employment Services) ("AC for L (ES)") explained that while there were 22 166 job seekers registering for LD's employment services in the first 10 months of 2013, it did not necessarily mean that all these job seekers were unemployed. Some of the job seekers registering for LD's employment services might wish to find another employment. Besides, job seekers could make application to employers direct for job vacancies placed at LD's job centres. As they were not required to report successful placements to LD, these placements could not be captured.

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21. As regards EPM, AC for L (ES) advised that the programme aimed at encouraging employers to engage unemployed job seekers aged 40 or above with employment difficulties in full-time jobs and provide them with on-the-job training, through the provision of training allowance to employers. Job seekers placed under EPM were those aged 40 or above and had an unemployment period of not less than one month within one year prior to the commencement date of employment. AC for L (ES) drew members' attention to the fact that as a result of the vibrant economy in the past few years, the overall unemployment rate remained low. As such, there were fewer job seekers with employment difficulties seeking employment assistance from LD. For the middle-aged, the unemployment rate was 2.8% in 2012 as compared with 4.5% in 2006.

22. That said, to encourage employers to offer more openings to the middle-aged with employment difficulties and provide them with on-the-job training, AC for L (ES) said that LD had increased the monthly training allowance payable to employers under EPM from \$1,500 to \$2,000 in 2009 and further to \$3,000 in June 2013 for employing eligible job seekers. Moreover, the payment period had been extended from three months to a maximum of six months in 2009. LD had strengthened the promotion of EPM through various channels so as to attract more employers to participate in EPM.

23. Mr KWOK Wai-keung noted with concern that as shown from the job retention surveys on the middle-aged receiving on-the-job training conducted by LD, only around 62% of the middle-aged persons had stayed in the full-time job for six months or more. Mr KWOK enquired about the nature of posts secured through EPM and the relevant monthly earnings. He further asked whether LD had conducted any review on the difficulties in job retention and what measures would be taken to address the problem. Mr KWOK further enquired whether the Administration would take the lead in developing emerging industries so as to help the middle-aged and the retirees to enter or re-join the labour market.

24. Mr SIN Chung-kai considered that the crux of the problem of middle-aged unemployment was due to a mismatch between the job skills possessed by the unemployed labour and those required of in the emerging industries. In his view, the provision of training allowance under EPM to employers engaging unemployed middle-aged job seekers was ineffective in assisting the middle-aged to secure employment. Instead, the Government should collaborate with employers of the emerging industries in providing appropriate training and retraining to the middle-aged.

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25. SLW responded that the Employees Retraining Board had widely consulted employer associations and the relevant Industry Consultative Network as well as other parties concerned in the development of the training and retraining courses for the service targets, including the middle-aged, and the courses were offered in response to the needs of the market. SLW stressed that the financial incentive payable to employers under employment programmes was offered on the condition of their provision of on-the-job training to the middle-aged employees engaged according to the programme requirements.

26. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that a considerable number of female home-makers and middle-aged persons were capable of taking up jobs, but they encountered difficulties in entering or re-joining the labour market. Notably, the former had to balance the needs between taking care of their families and taking up full-time employment, and the latter was much concerned about the long working hours. Mr TANG enquired whether the Administration would adopt new initiatives to help these two groups of potential workforce to overcome the barriers to re-join the labour market.

27. SLW said that while the Administration was committed to providing complementary measures to facilitate the potential workforce to join the employment market, such as child care and elderly care support services, it was equally important that employers would provide their employees with a family-friendly working environment with flexible and varied work arrangements and support, which would help them balance their roles and responsibilities in work and family. SLW further said that the Steering Committee on Population Policy ("SCPP") was inviting views from the public on how to create a supportive environment to help the economically inactive persons, including the early retirees, who were willing to get employed enter or re-join the employment market, and the elderly employees stay longer in the labour force. The views collected would help SCPP in its next stage of work, which involved formulating strategies to address the population challenges and mapping out an actionable agenda covering short and long-term measures.

28. Mr TANG Ka-piu considered it important that the Administration, after consolidating the public's views collected during the consultation period, could have a clear stance on three topical issues of public concern, namely, legislating for standard working hours and anti-discrimination against age at workplace, and review on the continuous contract requirements under EO. In his view, these issues would further safeguard employees' rights and benefits and thereby unleashing the potential labour force.

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29. SLW said that LD had conducted a review on the continuous contract requirements. The Administration briefed the Panel in July 2013 on several possible approaches to deal with the issue and would further consult the Labour Advisory Board on the matter.

30. Mr CHUNG Kwok-pan shared the views expressed by the deputations on the difficulties faced by female home-makers to enter or re-join the employment market. Expressing concern about the provision of child care services which was part and parcel for releasing the female home-makers to join the workforce, Mr CHUNG asked about the Administration's plan for increasing the relevant resources allocation.

31. SLW said that a variety of subsidised child care services for children of different ages were provided in the community. To further meet the service needs of families, a working group under the Special Needs Groups Task Force of the Commission on Poverty had been set up to study the child care services. SLW reiterated that the Administration was collecting the public's views on how to unleash the potential of existing population, including, among others, encouraging female home-makers to enter or re-join the employment market.

Age discrimination in employment

32. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was concerned about the employment difficulties, in particular age discrimination faced by job seekers aged 40 to 65. In anticipation of the aggravation of the situation if the retirement age was further extended, the issue should be addressed as soon as practicable. As the first step, the Administration should consider legislating for age discrimination against job seekers. He enquired about the Administration's stance on the matter.

33. SLW reiterated that the survey previously conducted by the consultant on the subject revealed that the most effective way in tackling age discrimination in employment was through education and publicity rather than through legislation. Nevertheless, he did not rule out the possibility of revisiting the matter in the light of the circumstantial changes.

34. Citing the positive impact of the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 480) on the employment of females in trades and industries which were traditionally dominated by males, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung maintained the view that age discrimination in employment could only be tackled effectively through legislative means.

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The Chairman shared a similar view. With reference to the adoption of earlier retirement age for flight attendants as compared with the ground staff and pilots in some airlines, the Chairman took the view that such discriminatory acts should be rectified through legislative means.

35. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung recalled that prior to the reunification, the retirement age of teachers could be extended from 60 to 65 on the recommendation of school principals and subject to the physical fitness of the teachers concerned. Mr LEUNG invited views from the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union ("HKPTU") as to whether the reinstatement of such arrangement could address the concerns about the need to strike a balance of optimising the experience of senior teaching staff while not hindering the career prospects of younger teaching staff. In response, Mr WONG Hak-lim, representative of HKPTU said that while HKPTU supported extending the retirement age of principals and teachers who were willing to work, it considered that priority should be given to address the strong request from the sector to convert the contract teaching posts to established posts so as to attract the younger generations to join the profession.

Employees' compensation insurance

36. Mr POON Siu-ping expressed concern about difficulties in taking out employees' compensation insurance (commonly known as "labour insurance") for elderly employees and its impact on the elderly employment.

37. Referring to Mr POON Siu-ping's concern, Mr CHAN Kin-por said that to his understanding from the insurance sector, age of employees was not a factor in determining the premiums for taking out labour insurance and there was no age limit for procurement of labour insurance. SLW said that as Mr CHAN Kin-por, who was returned from the insurance constituency, had rightly pointed out that age was not a consideration factor in the procurement of labour insurance for employees, concerns about taking out labour insurance for elderly employees should not be a reason for not engaging elderly employees.

38. In the light of the launch of the public engagement exercise on population policy, the Chairman requested the Administration to take heed of various issues of concern raised by members, including legislating for anti-discrimination against age at workplaces, difficulties in taking out labour insurance for the elderly employees, employment terms for school teachers and the impact of extending working life of elderly employees on the career prospects of the younger generations.

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[To allow more time for discussion, members agreed to extend the meeting by 15 minutes.]

IV. Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)497/13-14(07) and (08))

39. At the invitation of the Chairman, SLW briefed members on the latest position of the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy ("WITS") Scheme as detailed in the Administration's paper. SLW also briefed members on the latest adjustments to the income and asset limits of the WITS Scheme which would take effect from the claim month of February 2014, as detailed in the Administration's paper tabled at the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The tabled document was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)551/13-14(02) on 19 December 2013.)

40. Members noted the background brief entitled "Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

Views of deputations

41. At the invitation of the Chairman, 18 deputations presented their views on the subject. A summary of the views of deputations is in **Annex II**.

Eligibility criteria

42. Mr SIN Chung-kai held the view that the objective of WITS was to help low-income earners reduce their cost of travelling to and from work and encourage them to secure or stay in employment, which was not welfare benefit such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") and Old Age Living Allowance. The eligibility criteria for the WITS Scheme should therefore be further relaxed. Mr POON Siu Ping considered it imperative to remove the asset test requirement so as to promote sustained employment. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned that the stringent income and asset limits had resulted in the small number of qualified applicants.

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43. In response, SLW advised that under the annual adjustment mechanism adopted in the mid-term review which was conducted in August 2012, the income and asset limits of the WITS Scheme would be adjusted concurrently with those of the CSSA Scheme. He added that the latest income and asset limits would take effect from the claim month of February 2014. Specifically, the income limits would be updated on the basis of the median monthly household income in the third quarter of 2013 and the asset limits would be pegged to three times the asset limits of the CSSA Scheme as adjusted. SLW said that the suggestion of relaxing the income and asset limits would be taken into consideration in the comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme which would commence in October 2014. Due consideration would also be given to the implementation of the "dual-track approach" i.e. applicants were given the choice of undergoing a means test on a household basis or individual basis, which took effect from the claim months in 2013. Deputations' views expressed on the WITS Scheme would also be taken into account.

Application and implementation of the WITS Scheme

44. Mr TANG Ka-piu expressed concern that the application procedures for the WITS Scheme were not user-friendly to the applicants and would have discouraged needy low-income employees from submitting applications. Mr TANG sought information on the proportion of applications which were subsequently withdrawn. C for L responded that around 13% of the applications had been withdrawn since the inception of the WITS Scheme. However, information on the reasons for withdrawal of applications was not available. He supplemented that following a review to simplify the application forms, applicants would only have to complete a much simpler two-page application form and sign on the third page for individual-based application. The information to be submitted by applicants had been substantially reduced and the application method had been made simpler and easier. The Administration also welcomed workable suggestions for further improvement to the application procedures.

45. Mr POON Siu-ping noted with concern that as shown from the breakdown of applicants by occupation in the Annex to the Administration's paper, there were 792 professionals receiving WITS. C for L said that many of them were part-time tutors.

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Review of the level of subsidy

46. Mr TANG Ka-piu was concerned about whether the current level of subsidy was sufficient to relieve the burden of travelling expenses of the low-income workers. Noting from the General Household Survey ("GHS") conducted by C&SD, the average monthly expense of WITS target beneficiaries on public transport for travelling to and from work was \$436, and that for those working across districts was \$489, Mr TANG sought information on the respective proportion of WITS applicants whose monthly work-related travelling expenses exceeded the full-rate subsidy of \$600, and whose average travelling expenses were \$489 and \$436. SLW and C for L advised that as applicants under the WITS Scheme were not required to provide information on their actual travelling expenses when making applications, the Administration did not have the information.

47. Pointing that the income and asset limits of the WITS Scheme would be updated annually, Mr TANG Ka-piu enquired whether similar mechanism could be adopted for reviewing the subsidy level.

48. Mr SIN Chung-kai shared a similar concern. Given that only a small portion of the non-recurrent commitment of \$4,805 million endorsed by the Finance Committee for implementing the WITS Scheme had been utilised since its inception and having regard to the rise in the public transport cost which was more than 5% in the past two years, Mr SIN asked whether the Administration would consider expanding the scope of the WITS Scheme to encourage employment and which in turn would mitigate the pressure on labour shortage.

49. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed strong dissatisfaction about the timetable for the comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme. He was concerned that the level of subsidy would be revised in 2015 at the earliest if the comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme was to commence in October 2014. To simplify the adjustment mechanism, the subsidy rate should be adjusted automatically in accordance with the inflation rate and movement of Consumer Price Index compiled by C&SD or the rise in the public transport fares. Instead of importing more labour under SLS to address the problem of labour shortage in some specific industries, Mr WONG considered that the subsidy level should be appropriately adjusted upward so as to attract the sizeable potential workforce to join the labour market or stay in employment, in particular those residing in the remote areas. Moreover, the relatively large number

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of applicants receiving subsidy living in Kwai Tsing, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long had fully demonstrated that they were in need of the transport subsidy.

50. Responding to members' concerns, SLW said that according to GHS conducted by C&SD in the fourth quarter of 2012, the average monthly expense of WITS target beneficiaries on public transport for travelling to and from work was \$436, and that for those working across districts was \$489. This showed that the present full-rate WITS at \$600 per month should provide sufficient support to most eligible applicants. SLW reiterated that the Administration had undertaken to commence a comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme in October 2014 after three years of its operation. LD had commissioned C&SD to collect the latest statistics on the travelling expenses of the beneficiaries of the WITS Scheme for commuting to and from work in the first quarter of 2014. SLW assured members that the Administration would continue monitoring the position, having regard to the relevant GHS statistics.

51. Mr POON Siu-ping enquired when the results of the comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme would be made available and whether the Administration would consider advancing the timetable for the review. SLW responded that it was expected that the comprehensive review would take a few months to complete and hopefully the enhancement measures, if any, could be worked out in early 2015.

Administration cost

52. Noting that a total subsidy payment of some \$490 million had been made to the successful applicants since the inception of the WITS Scheme, Mr TANG Ka-piu asked about the administration cost so incurred. C for L responded that a non-recurrent commitment of \$4,805 million (time-limited to 2014-2015) was approved by the Finance Committee for implementing the WITS Scheme, and some \$398 million was earmarked for administration fee, including staff cost and operating expenses, i.e. around 8% of the commitment. The administration cost for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 (up to end of November 2013) were some \$64 million and \$53 million respectively. With the increase in the number of applications under the "dual-track" application method, the proportion of the administration cost was expected to decrease.

53. The Chairman considered the administration cost for implementing the WITS Scheme too high and unacceptable. Pointing out that the take-up rate of the WITS Scheme was far below the Administration's

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estimation of around 200 000 beneficiaries put forward in the relevant funding proposal, the Chairman criticised that the administration cost was disproportionate to the subsidy payment and number of applicants.

54. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung echoed a similar concern about the high administration cost. Instead of providing WITS to encourage the low-income earners to secure or stay in employment, Mr LEUNG held the view that the Administration could effectively address the problem of labour shortage by raising the statutory minimum wage level to, say, \$35 per hour.

Publicity work

55. The Chairman expressed concern about the Administration's publicity efforts in promoting the WITS Scheme to the eligible ethnic minorities ("EM"). C for L responded that LD had extensively publicised the WITS Scheme and its "dual track" application method to EM through different means, including publishing leaflets in different ethnic languages, advertising on radio programmes for EM as well as in EM support service centres, and briefing EM groups on the details of the Scheme. The WITS Scheme would also be publicised in job fairs targeted at EM.

56. In conclusion, the Chairman called on the Administration to take heed of the views of members and deputations and seriously consider advancing the comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme, relaxing the eligibility criteria for the WITS Scheme and adjusting upwardly the subsidy rates. SLW said that the suggestions would be further studied.

V. Report on Occupational Diseases and Occupational Health Performance in Hong Kong in the first half of 2013

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)491/13-14(11) and (12))

[Mr SIN Chung-kai was elected among members to chair the meeting during the temporary absence of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman.]

57. Deputy Commissioner for Labour (Occupational Safety and Health) ("DC for L (OSH)") briefly took members through the situation of occupational diseases in Hong Kong in the first half of 2013, and the work of LD to enhance occupational health of professional drivers, container terminal workers and employees engaging in workplaces with a higher risk of heat stroke as set out in the Administration's paper.

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58. Members noted the background brief entitled "Occupational diseases in Hong Kong" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

59. Referring to the work injuries cases of some crane operators at container terminals suffering from repetitive strain injuries of the neck and shoulder because of prolonged work as raised at the Panel meeting in November 2013, Mr POON Siu-ping enquired about the follow-up action taken by LD and whether specific measures would be taken to address the problem. Mr POON further enquired whether container handling operators were required to issue guidelines on rest time arrangement for container terminal workers with a view to safeguarding the latter's OSH.

60. DC for L (OSH) and Occupational Health Consultant of LD ("OHC/LD") said that officers of LD had conducted site inspections to the container yards in respect of OSH of container terminal workers. To address the neck and back strain of crane operators arising from controlling the upward and downward movements of containers, OHC/LD said that LD had urged the container handling operators to implement improvement measures, including proper maintenance of cranes and ensuring the integrity of operators' seats, as well as provision of extra back rests for the crane operators. Besides, the container handling operators had produced audiovisual materials about stretching exercise to encourage and guide workers to do proper stretching exercise during rest breaks. In addition, health talks were conducted by LD's nurses to deliver relevant OSH messages and demonstrate stretching exercise to the workers. OHC/LD added that LD would continue to follow up with the container handling operators to enhance OSH of container terminal workers.

61. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung expressed concern that container terminal workers were required to work long hours without rest breaks. He asked about the relevant working hours and rest break arrangement.

62. OHC/LD advised that LD had urged the container handling operators to make improvements in various aspects, including the arrangement of meal and rest breaks. At present, crane operators could take rest when they were on standby, and they were provided with a 15-minute meal break at the control cabin during which they could also do some stretching exercise. Alternatively, crane operators could opt to leave the control cabin to take meal for one hour.

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63. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was concerned that other than the six musculoskeletal diseases which had been prescribed as occupational diseases, musculoskeletal disorders such as low back pain and shoulder-neck pain resulting from the interaction of multiple risk factors, including obesity, lack of exercise, excessive force and awkward posture, were not prescribed as occupational disease but were classified as work-related diseases on the ground that they were commonly found in the general population and not limited to workers engaged in a certain occupation. Mr LEUNG held the view that musculoskeletal disorders should be prescribed as occupational diseases if they were resulted from the employers' failure to provide proper training and equipment for performing the jobs. He asked whether the Administration would consider revisiting the issue.

64. OHC/LD advised that Hong Kong followed the international practices and would make reference to the criteria adopted by the International Labour Organization in determining whether a disease should be prescribed as an occupational disease. Prescription of a disease as an occupational disease was based on the criteria of whether workers engaged in a certain occupation in Hong Kong had a significant and recognised risk of contracting the disease; and whether a causal relationship between the disease and the occupation could be reasonably presumed or established in individual cases.

65. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, however, pointed out that consequent upon the long working hours situation and the absence of statutory standard working hours in Hong Kong, it was not appropriate to follow the international practices in this context. Mr LEUNG held the view that the long working hours situation had adversely affected employees' health and caused the contracting of musculoskeletal disorders, which should be prescribed as occupational diseases.

66. In response, OHC/LD said that the working hours of an occupation was one of the factors taken into consideration in determining whether a disease should be prescribed as an occupational disease.

67. Noting that there were 44 confirmed cases of silicosis in 2012 and 31 confirmed cases in the first half of 2013, Mr SIN Chung-kai asked about the reasons for the rising trend. OHC/LD explained that silicosis was a chronic disease with fibrosis of the lungs owing to inhalation of silica dust and its latent period could be as long as 10 to 20 years. The patients of most cases were construction workers who had exposure to

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silica dust many years ago. To assess whether the situation had deteriorated, the change in case number had to be observed over a long period of time. OHC/LD stressed that the Administration would continue to closely monitor the relevant statistics.

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68. Mr SIN Chung-kai expressed concern about the risk posed to the general public's safety when passenger service vehicles were in service. To ensure that the professional drivers concerned were physically fit to provide safe transport services, Mr SIN sought information on the progress of discussion between the Transport and Housing Bureau/Transport Department and the franchised bus companies in respect of the health check arrangements for bus captains. DC for L (OSH) said that he would follow up with the bureau/department and provide the information after the meeting.

69. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:39 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 February 2014

Panel on Manpower

Meeting on Tuesday, 17 December 2013, at 3:30 pm

Summary of views and concerns expressed by deputations on "Extending retirement age and employment for the middle-aged"

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
1.	Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union [LC Paper No. CB(2)526/13-14(01)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation in principle raised no objection to extending the retirement age of principals and teachers to pass on in the education sector their rich experience in education administration and teaching. Given their jobs were not physically demanding, it was believed that they could continue to perform if their retirement age of 60 was to be extended as appropriate. ● Extending the retirement age might, however, hinder the career prospects of younger teachers. There was also concern about contract teaching positions in the school establishment, which made joining the profession unattractive because of lack of job security. The Government should address these issues. Otherwise, it was envisaged that the education team would become ageing and suffer from high wastage.
2.	Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given the general improvement in health, higher education attainment and availability of less physically demanding jobs, most of the employees could continue to work after retirement. It was suggested that an elderly employment fund be set up by the Government to subsidise enterprises and organisations to recruit the elderly. ● The Government should conduct a study on the special employment needs of the elderly such as maximum daily working hours and workloads, provide support measures as appropriate as well as remove the barriers that hindered the elderly from staying in the labour market. For instance, age discrimination at workplaces and the difficulties in taking out employees' compensation insurance (commonly known as "labour insurance") for the elderly employees. ● In extending the retirement age, the Government should give consideration to the impact on relevant retirement schemes and complementary measures, including the Mandatory Provident Fund ("MPF") system, elderly welfare programmes, housing and the community facilities.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
3.	The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (Rights & Benefits Committee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation was in support of releasing the potential labour force, including the middle-aged and women to enter the employment market. Consideration could be given to making use of the Qualifications Framework to assist the middle-aged people to find suitable jobs. Moreover, the Government could promote middle-aged employment in the small and medium enterprises through education and publicity. ● In the light of the different retirement ages in various trades and industries, the Government should legislate for statutory retirement age with a view to better protecting the employees. In the implementation of extending the retirement age of employees, the Government should conduct a study on how to avoid hindering the career prospects of the younger generations and consider setting up a central compensation insurance fund to address the difficulties of enterprises in procuring labour insurance for the elderly employees. ● Given the inadequate protection under the MPF Scheme for low-skilled workers after retirement, the Government should introduce the universal retirement protection scheme.
4.	The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions [LC Paper No. CB(2)491/13-14(04)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation was in support of extending employees' retirement age, except for physically demanding jobs, so as to release the potential labour force of the elderly and facilitate pass-on of invaluable work experience. However, the career prospects of younger generations should not be hindered. ● The extension of retirement age of employees should be implemented in a progressive and flexible manner. Appropriate retirement ages should be set for different trades and industries, having regard to the different job requirements in respect of experience, labour and skills. ● The Government should take the lead in extending the retirement age in the civil service so as to set an example for the private sector. ● Extending the retirement age could only mitigate the pressure on the labour market in face of the ageing population and shrinking of labour force. The deputation also urged the Government to enhance retirement protection for the elderly.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
5.	Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (NT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As many middle-aged were low-skilled and less-educated, they did not possess the information technology knowledge in making use of the employment support services in the employment centres. According to a survey conducted by the deputation several years ago, only around 10% of the respondents had successfully secured employment through LD's employment support services. ● The Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("EPM") could not serve the purpose of facilitating the middle-aged in finding suitable jobs. ● The Administration was urged to consider actively legislating for age discrimination at workplaces in view of the acute age discrimination in employment in different trades and industries.
6.	Concern Public Transportation Affairs Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having stayed out of the labour force for a long period of time, many middle-aged females encountered difficulties in entering or re-joining the employment market because of various reasons, including lack of working experience and low education attainment. ● Doubts were expressed about the effectiveness of EPM in providing the middle-aged with appropriate employment support to find suitable jobs. ● In the light of the ageing population and the projected decrease in the labour force, the Government should allocate more resources for the long-term planning and creation of more employment opportunities for middle-aged females so as to assist them in entering the employment market and thereby achieving a win-win situation.
7.	Smart & Beauty House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The retirement age should be raised from 65 to 75 for employees who were physically fit to work. ● It was suggested that low-income subsidy and rent allowance be provided to the needy middle-aged employees. Consideration should be given to providing appropriate support for those who wished to start up their own business, including re-issuance of hawker licences. ● The Government should strive to preserve the continual operation of small shops that located at the new town development area, which would be crucial to the self-reliance of the middle-aged shop owners.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
8.	Northern District Employment Concern Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation was in support of creating more employment opportunities for the middle-aged and extending the retirement age so as to increase the labour force. It was recommended that the retirement age be extended by five to 10 years, say from 65 to 70 for cleaning services employees and security guards. ● In the light of the ageing population and projected decrease in the labour force as highlighted in the consultation document on population policy released by the Steering Committee on Population Policy in October 2013 ("the Consultation Document"), the deputation raised objection to the proposal of importing more labour under the Supplementary Labour Scheme to address the labour shortage problems, as this would adversely affect the livelihood of local workers. ● Apart from encouraging female home-makers to enter or re-join the labour market, the Administration should provide appropriate employment support for the middle-aged, including offering on-the-job training to increase their employability, providing incentive payment to employers of middle-aged and elimination of age discrimination at workplaces.
9.	Tin Shui Wai Community Development Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As demonstrated by numerous unsuccessful job-searching cases of middle-aged residents in Tin Shui Wai, the deputation urged the Administration to address the problem of age discrimination in employment through legislative means as soon as practicable. ● In view of the lack of appropriate work types for the middle-aged, the Administration should develop the recycling industry which would create a considerable number of job opportunities for the low-skilled and less-educated workers.
10.	The Lion Rock Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The underlying issue in the Consultation Document was to address the sustainability of the welfare system in the light of an ageing population and shrinking of labour force. Instead of extending the retirement age to address the ageing problem, the Administration should reduce the welfare dependency of the elderly so as to ensure that social security payment was the last resort for those in genuine need. Specifically, it should consider adopting more stringent criteria for the eligibility of elderly welfare benefits, such as means-tested Old Age Allowance. ● The Government should strive to eliminate age discrimination in employment. Particularly, it was incumbent upon the Equal Opportunities Commission to look into the matter.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
11.	Liberal Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation was in support of extending the working life of employees and importation of labour as ways to address the labour shortage problem in certain industries. ● According to a survey conducted by the deputation in December 2013 on the proposal to extend the retirement age of the civil servants, around 70% of the respondents expressed support to extend the retirement ages of 55 - 60 to 60 - 65 in the light of the longer life expectancy and better physique of those aged over 60 who were considered fit to work. ● In the absence of statutory retirement age in Hong Kong, the Government should take the lead in extending the retirement age of the civil service.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 February 2014

Panel on Manpower

Meeting on Tuesday, 17 December 2013, at 3:30 pm

**Summary of views and concerns expressed by deputations
on "Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme"**

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
1.	Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable more low-income workers to benefit from the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy ("WITS") Scheme, the eligibility criteria should be relaxed, including raising the income and asset limits. In view of the increasing transport cost, in particular for those living in remote areas and working across districts, the subsidy level needed to be upwardly adjusted as appropriate. • The application procedures should be streamlined, including reducing the submission of supporting information and simplifying the application form. • Consideration should be given to providing the applicants with a job search allowance of \$600 under the WITS Scheme, as adopted under the former Transport Support Scheme. • Consideration should be given to converting the WITS Scheme into a low-income supplement scheme for the working-poor families not on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA").
2.	Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than half of the working population of the ethnic minorities was not aware of the WITS Scheme. The Administration should strengthen the publicity efforts in promoting the WITS Scheme to the ethnic minorities through different channels, including their newspapers. • Consideration should be given to relaxing the eligibility criteria for the WITS Scheme, including removing the means test requirement and raising the monthly income threshold for different household sizes. The cash value of applicants' insurance policies should be disregarded in determining the applicants' total personal asset value.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
3.	Kwai Chung Community Workers' Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Concern was expressed about the reduction in the subsidy under the WITS Scheme after the introduction of low-income allowance for working-poor families as reported by the media. The two schemes should be regarded as separate schemes since they served different objectives. ● Consideration should be given to raising the monthly income limits under the WITS Scheme in the light of the wage adjustment following the implementation of the statutory minimum wage ("SMW"). The subsidy level should also be raised as the actual travelling expenses of many applicants far exceeded the full-rate subsidy of \$600 per month.
4.	Kwai Chung Estate Labour Rights Concern Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Administration was urged to remove the means test requirement for making applications under the WITS Scheme. The stringent income and asset limits under the WITS Scheme had discouraged the needy low-income employees from submitting applications or made many of them ineligible to apply for WITS. ● It was unreasonable that applicants had to undergo a means test when applying for WITS which was intended to relieve the burden of transport cost incurred in commuting to and from work and to encourage low-income earners to stay in employment. ● The cash value of applicants' insurance policies should be excluded from the calculation of their personal asset value under the WITS Scheme.
5.	Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The deputation objected to converting WITS into low-income allowance as it would possibly reduce the total amount of subsidy for needy low-income working families. ● The Administration was urged to relax the eligibility criteria for WITS, including removing the means test requirement or raising the income threshold. In particular, the cash value of applicants' insurance policies, which was meant to provide protection for medical expenses and retirement, should not be included in the calculation of asset value. ● A comprehensive review on the WITS Scheme should be conducted prior to October 2014 and the subsidy rate should be raised to at least \$800 per month.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
6.	Democratic Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The full-rate subsidy of \$600 per month and half-rate subsidy of \$300 per month for work-related travelling expenses under the WITS Scheme had remained unchanged for years. In the light of the rise in transport cost in recent years and having regard to the policy objective of the WITS Scheme of encouraging cross-district employment, the subsidy rates should be adjusted upward as appropriate so as to sustain employment. ● Given most low-paid workers in Hong Kong generally enjoyed a pay rise after the implementation of SMW and that they had to work for long hours, many of them were ineligible to apply for WITS because their monthly wage exceeded the income limits. The Administration was urged to conduct a review on the income and asset limits for different household sizes and raised the limits as appropriate. ● The Administration should strengthen the efforts in promoting the WITS Scheme and streamlining the application procedures. Consideration should be given to providing assistance to applicants in filling out the application form.
7.	爭取低收入家庭保障聯席	<p>The deputation objected to the proposal of combining WITS with low-income allowance for working families because of the following reasons -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the two types of subsidies served different purposes, i.e. WITS aimed at relieving the burden of transport cost for home-workplace commuting for working poor, while the low-income allowance for working families was one of the poverty alleviation measures. ● it would be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the WITS Scheme in encouraging low-income earners to secure or stay in employment if they also received low-income allowance concurrently.
8.	The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (Rights & Benefits Committee) [LC Paper No. CB(2)551/13-14(03)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The provision of \$600 WITS for low-income earners was insufficient to cover their work-related travelling expenses in view of the rise in the transport cost. The Administration was urged to seriously consider increasing the subsidy rates under the WITS Scheme for working across districts. ● Consideration should be given to abolishing the means test requirement under the WITS Scheme or raising the income limits having regard to a pay rise for most of the low-income earners following the implementation of SMW in 2011. The application procedures should

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
		<p>also be simplified and a mechanism should be set up for reviewing the subsidy rates on a regular basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of WITS should be maintained when introducing the low-income allowance for working families.
9.	<p>The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions [LC Paper No. CB(2)491/13-14(09)]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WITS Scheme had been proven ineffective in view of the low take-up rate. It was largely attributed to the complicated and cumbersome application procedures and the limited amount of the subsidy. • Given the full-rate subsidy of \$600 had remained unchanged since the inception of the Transport Support Scheme in 2007 and that the cumulative increase in the major public transport fares was around 13%, the full-rate subsidy under the WITS Scheme should be adjusted upward to \$680. • To achieve the aim of sustaining employment of low-income workers, applicants meeting the monthly income limits should be eligible for WITS without being required to undergo the asset test.
10.	<p>關注婦女零散工小組</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work-related travelling expenses for some middle-aged female employees taking up casual and fragmented work in other districts amounted to some 20% of their daily wage. The Administration should provide more support for these employees by removing the means test requirement under the WITS Scheme. • It was unreasonable to include the cash value of applicants' insurance policies in determining the total personal asset value under the WITS Scheme as it could not be readily converted into cash to meet the immediate needs of the policy-holders.
11.	<p>Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (NT)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that close to 40% of the total number of applicants receiving subsidy resided in the four districts identified as the poorest districts in the "Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2012", namely Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, North and Kwai Tsing, it was evident that that the provision of WITS could encourage and assist low-income earners to work across districts. Moreover, around 48.5% of the applicants receiving subsidy were engaged in the elementary occupations. This indicated that the grassroots employees were in need of WITS.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many low-income earners were ineligible to apply for WITS because of not meeting the asset threshold requirement. Specifically, their asset value exceeded the limit simply because the cash value of their insurance policies was regarded as assets under the WITS Scheme. ● Consideration should be given to streamlining the application procedures under the WITS Scheme and making them user-friendly. Difficulties were encountered by casual workers such as promoters in supermarkets in providing employment details.
12.	Concern Public Transportation Affairs Alliance [LC Paper No. CB(2)551/13-14(04)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given the expensive public transport cost, the Administration should consider seriously adjusting the full-rate WITS to \$1,000 per month or providing a monthly pass for commuting to and from work by public transport. ● The deputation raised objection to integrating WITS with the low-income allowance for working families in view of their different nature and objectives.
13.	Smart & Beauty House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The adjustment of income limits under the WITS Scheme lagged behind the wage level in the labour market following the implementation of SMW since 2011. The income limits for individual-based application should be raised on par with that for one-person applicant for public rental housing. ● To encourage more target beneficiaries to apply for WITS, consideration should be given to abolishing the asset requirement. Specifically, the cash value of the personal insurance policies should be disregarded in determining the value of personal asset.
14.	Northern District Employment Concern Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most of the individual-based applicants receiving half-rate subsidy were casual workers or local domestic helpers. The small number of qualified applicants was attributed to the complicated application procedures for the WITS Scheme, including provision of employment details. ● The deputation strongly objected to integrating WITS with the low-income allowance for working families, and was concerned about the possible reduction in the subsidy payment after the integration of the two schemes. ● Given the rise in the public transport cost in recent years, it was necessary to conduct a review on the subsidy rates of WITS.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
15.	Tin Shui Wai Community Development Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instead of conducting a comprehensive review of the WITS Scheme in October 2014 after three years of operation, the Administration should advance the review as soon as practicable. Given the increasing transport cost, the present subsidy rate was insufficient to cover the work-related travelling expenses. According to a survey conducted by the deputation and other organisations on the WITS Scheme in June 2013, the average work-related travelling expenses of the 200 respondents was \$784. The full-rate WITS should therefore be increased from \$600 to \$800 per month with a view to encouraging more target beneficiaries residing in remote areas such as Tin Shui Wai, Lantau Island and the North District to take up employment across districts. ● The deputation objected to incorporating WITS into the low-income allowance for working families, and was concerned about the possible reduction in the subsidy payment after the integration of the two schemes.
16.	Public Housing Concern Group for Ethnic Minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There was a limited number of ethnic minorities applying for WITS because the majority of them was not aware of the Scheme. The Administration should strengthen the publicity work through different channels, such as their newspapers to promote the WITS Scheme to the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. ● The application procedures under the WITS Scheme were cumbersome, inflexible and not user-friendly. A considerable number of the ethnic minorities were casual workers and they encountered difficulties in submitting supporting information on employment details for WITS applications. ● The existing income limits for WITS application were too low and they should be raised as appropriate.
17.	Labour Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Administration should seriously consider relaxing the eligibility criteria for the WITS Scheme, and abolishing the asset threshold requirement in the long run. ● To relieve the burden of transport cost for home-workplace commuting for employed persons from low-income families and encourage them to secure or stay in employment, the Administration should increase the subsidy rate of WITS as soon as practicable.

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of WITS should not be integrated with the low-income allowance for working families as these two schemes served different target beneficiaries.
18.	New People's Party [LC Paper No. CB(2)526/13-14(02)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the difference in actual work-related travelling expenses, it was inappropriate to provide a flat rate of \$600 WITS per month. To use effectively the public fund, the Administration should consider providing transport subsidy by offering fare discount per trip under the Octopus system. This would encourage the WITS recipients to work across districts while saving subsidy payment for those whose actual travelling expenses were less than the flat rate subsidy.

Council Business Division 2
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