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Panel on Manpower

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 19 May 2015**

Employment services of the Labour Department

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Manpower on the employment services provided by the Labour Department ("LD") since the Fourth Legislative Council ("LegCo").

Background

2. According to the Administration, LD provides free recruitment assistance to employers and employment services to job seekers through a network of 13 job centres throughout the territory, two recruitment centres for the catering and retail industries, the Job Vacancy Processing Centre and the Telephone Employment Service Centre. Apart from paying visits to job centres, job seekers may obtain the latest vacancy information through the Interactive Employment Service ("iES") website as well as the various vacancy search terminals located throughout the territory.

3. To cater for the needs of different job seekers, LD administers various specialised employment programmes, including the Youth Employment and Training Programme ("YETP") (formerly known as the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme), the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("EPM"), the Work Trial Scheme and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme. Under these programmes, job seekers are provided with tailor-made employment support services such as the provision of work trials in actual working environment and on-the-job training, etc. Both large-scale and district-based job fairs are

organised to facilitate job seekers to apply for jobs and attend interviews with employers on the spot.

Deliberations of the Panel

Employment assistance to the middle-aged

4. Members noted with concern that while there were 22 166 job seekers aged 40 or above registering for LD's employment services in the first 10 months of 2013, only 2 033 placements of middle-aged job seekers were recorded under EPM in the same period. Moreover, the number of placements under EPM decreased from some 9 700 in 2006 to 2 033 in the first 10 months of 2013. Members cast doubt about the effectiveness of EPM in encouraging middle-aged employment.

5. The Administration advised that EPM aimed at encouraging employers to engage unemployed job seekers aged 40 or above with employment difficulties in full-time jobs through the provision of on-the-job training allowance of up to \$3,000 per month for employers of mature job seekers for a period of three to six months. To encourage employers to offer more openings to these job seekers, as announced in the 2015 Policy Address, the Administration would extend EPM to cover part-time jobs in the second half of 2015 to encourage employers to provide more suitable part-time employment opportunities to elderly persons. The training allowance would be set at 25% of the employee's monthly salary, up to \$3,000, for a period of three to six months. As regards the decreasing number of placements under EPM, the Administration pointed out that some of the job seekers registered for LD's employment services were not unemployed, but they 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.

6. Noting that there was only about 62% of the placement cases in which the middle-aged persons stayed in the full-time job for six months or above in the first 10 months of 2013, some members were concerned that the provision of training allowance under EPM for employers engaging unemployed middle-aged job seekers was ineffective in assisting the middle-aged to secure employment. There was a suggestion that the Administration should collaborate with employers of the emerging industries in providing appropriate training and retraining to the middle-aged and the retirees so as to help them enter or re-join the labour market. The Administration advised that the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") 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.

Employment assistance to young people

7. Members expressed concern that the unemployment rate for young people was relatively higher than the overall employment rate in Hong Kong. Concern was raised about the employment support and training services to young people. The Administration advised that YETP launched by LD provided one-stop pre-employment and on-the-job training with a monthly salary of some \$8,000 for young school leavers aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment at sub-degree or below. It was expected that the trainees could secure employment with better remuneration in the labour market upon completion of the training and acquiring relevant working experience.

8. Some members considered that the Administration should place more emphasis on students rather than school leavers and young job seekers in promoting youth employment, in order to facilitate students to better understand the labour market and their own career aspirations at an early stage. The Administration considered it crucial to help young people start life planning at an early stage and understand the manpower requirements, career prospects and progression pathways in different trades and industries. To this end, LD had operated two Youth Employment Resource Centres, i.e. Youth Employment Start ("YES") at Mongkok and Kwai Fong since 2007 and 2008 respectively. YES offered personalised career advisory services, including career planning to young people aged between 15 and 29. LD had promoted the services of YES in schools and that around 74 000 young people including students had made use of such services in both 2011 and 2012.

9. Members also expressed grave concern about the provision of employment support and services to vulnerable young people, including the autistic youngsters, "hidden youth" and those with various kinds of disabilities. According to the Administration, LD had since 2010 launched Action S5 to strengthen assistance to young people aged 15 to 24 who had acute employment difficulties owing to barriers including low educational attainment, emotional/behavioural problems and learning difficulties, in addition to the employment service to job seekers with disabilities provided by the Selective Placement Division.

Women employment

10. Members had all along called for the provision of child care and elderly care services so as to release the females to join the labour force. There was a view that more resources should be provided by ERB to equip the females for entering the labour market. The Administration advised that ERB had since 2009 rebranded the "Integrated Scheme for Local Domestic Helpers" as the "Smart Living Scheme", which was a one-stop job matching and referral platform for household services, elderly care and support to increase the employment opportunities for graduates of relevant ERB training courses.

11. The Administration further advised that it would launch a series of measures to enhance child care services helping women balance their work and family commitments, including the provision, by phases, about 5 000 additional places of Extended Hours Service at aided child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres from 2015-2016 onwards and the enhancement of the after-school care services.

Employment assistance to ethnic minorities

12. Members enquired about the specific measures in place to address the employment difficulties of ethnic minorities job seekers, in particular language barrier faced by them. Pointing out that there was a considerable number of ethnic minorities and vulnerable families in Tung Chung, some members suggested that the Administration should proactively reach out to the ethnic minorities community to enhance their awareness of the employment support services provided by LD, say, mailing flyers to all households in Tung Chung.

13. The Administration advised that upon the commissioning of Tung Chung Job Centre, LD had carried out promotion through various channels, including mailing flyers to 17 500 households in Tung Chung to publicise the establishment and services of the job centre. In addition, Tung Chung Job Centre maintained close contact with non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") providing services in the district for groups with special needs so as to attain a better understanding of the employment needs and situation of the ethnic minorities groups concerned. It also strengthened collaboration with NGOs and encouraged them to refer job seekers with employment needs to LD for employment support services.

14. Members were also advised that LD launched a pilot project "Employment Services Ambassador Programme for Ethnic Minorities" in September 2014 to directly employ over 10 trainees of ethnic minorities of YETP as Employment Services Ambassadors in the job centres and job fairs of

LD for six months. The project sought to help job centres proactively reach out to other ethnic minorities job seekers and enhance the provision of employment services to them. It also helped the trainees acquire work experience and skills and map out their career plans. According to the Administration, a total of 18 ethnic minorities were offered employment as trainees in job centres under the pilot project (including two in Tung Chung Job Centre) and 15 of them accepted the appointment. These youths would undergo six-month on-the-job training with monthly remuneration of \$8,200. Upon completion of the project in March 2015, LD would conduct a review on the effectiveness of the pilot project.

Employment support to job seekers in remote districts

15. Members have all along been concerned about the employment support to job seekers residing in remote areas where the problem of unemployment was more serious and that the job seekers had to travel afar to visit the recruitment centres located in urban areas. While expressing support for the establishment of "Employment in One-stop" ("EOS") in Tin Shui Wai which aimed at providing one-stop employment and training services for vulnerable groups, some members considered the location of EOS inaccessible for job seekers living in other areas in Yuen Long District, such as Tuen Mun and Yuen Long Town. There was a view that the Administration should consider relocating EOS.

16. The Administration advised that Yuen Long district had a population of about 600 000 people and about half of them lived in Tin Shui Wai. The location of EOS was considered appropriate as it was in proximity to the target users and was easily accessible by various public transportation means from Yuen Long Town and Tuen Mun. To facilitate job seekers in obtaining employment and training/retraining services, an ERB service centre was also set up in the same building. The Administration further advised that while it was not easy to identify other suitable premises in Yuen Long district with sufficient space for provision of a variety of services and facilities similar to those available currently at EOS, LD would explore how EOS mode of operation could be extended to other areas/districts as appropriate.

17. Noting that only 419 out of a total of 1 592 unemployed able-bodied Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") recipients (i.e. around 26.3%) had secured full-time employment after receiving the case management and employment support services at EOS in 2012 and 2013, members were gravely concerned about that the EOS services were not effective in assisting CSSA recipients to find and maintain employment. Some members also expressed concern that over 90% of the participants of case management and

employment support services at EOS in 2012 and 2013 were unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients referred by Social Welfare Department ("SWD") while only 5.4% of the job seekers received the services on a voluntary basis. They cast doubt as to whether the operation of EOS could bring about positive impact on lowering the unemployment rate in Tin Shui Wai.

18. The Administration explained that the objective of setting up EOS in Tin Shui Wai aimed at strengthening the collaboration between LD and SWD with a view to enhancing employment support for job seekers with special employment difficulties in the district. It was therefore understandable that the majority of participants were unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients referred by SWD. Owing to the stable economy and buoyant job market in the recent years, job seekers in general found it relatively easy to find suitable employment. This explained why the number of participants receiving case management services on a voluntary basis was on the low side. The Administration advised that among the unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients referred by SWD and who had secured full-time employment, 52.5% had changed to low-earning CSSA cases and 47.5% had left the CSSA net. This indicated that the EOS services were to a certain extent effective in helping participants find work and become self-reliant.

19. There was a view that the Administration should consider introducing mobile employment support services to job seekers residing in remote areas. The Administration advised that while job seekers were welcome to visit the Job Centre in person, they could also obtain the latest job vacancy information through LD's iES website as well as several hundreds of vacancy search terminals located at its various job centres and other easily accessible locations, including Public Enquiry Service Centres of Home Affairs Department, community centres, and certain NGOs, and make direct job applications. In addition, job seekers could make use of iES applications to browse job vacancy information through smart phones or mobile communication devices.

Relevant papers

20. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant papers on the employment services of the Labour Department

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| Panel on Manpower | 21.1.2010 (Item IV) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 20.10.2011 (Item II) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 25.1.2013 (Item V) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 18.6.2013 (Item V) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 17.12.2013 (Item III) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 18.2.2014 (Item IV) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 17.7.2014 (Item III) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 16.12.2014 (Item IV) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| | 20.1.2015 (Item IV) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |
| Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services (Joint meeting) | 9.12.2013 (Item II) | <u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> |