

For information on  
14 July 2015

## **Legislative Council Panel on Manpower**

### **Promoting family-friendly employment practices**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the efforts of the Labour Department (LD) in promoting family-friendly employment practices (FFEP).

#### **Background**

2. LD is dedicated to promoting direct and candid communication between employers and employees in their discussion of employment conditions and work arrangements. Employers are further encouraged to adopt “employee-oriented” good management measures and to implement FFEP with a view to helping employees achieve a better balance between work and family life.

3. Making the workplace family-friendly is a shared responsibility of the entire community. Since 2006, LD, as one of the facilitators in promoting FFEP, has been encouraging employers to adopt these practices and provide the community with the relevant information with a view to cultivating a family friendly employment culture.

#### **Family-friendly employment practices**

4. FFEP are good people management measures adopted by employers to help employees fulfil their work and family responsibilities simultaneously. LD regularly reminds employers to grant employees various kinds of statutory leaves such as rest days, statutory holidays, annual leave, maternity leave and paternity leave as stipulated under the Employment Ordinance (EO) so as to allow employees to take rest, thereby balancing their work and family life.

LD also encourages employers to offer their employees with benefits that are more favourable than the statutory requirements and provide them with flexible and varied work arrangements and support to cater for individual employees' special needs at their different stages of life.

5. The focus of FFEP in LD's recent promotional activities includes encouraging employers to, having regard to the individual circumstances of their enterprises, put in place arrangements such as flexitime, five-day work week, work from home and providing part-time alternative. Moreover, LD recommends employers to provide, in addition to employees' statutory entitlements, family leave benefits such as permitting employees when necessary to take special leave, marriage leave, parental leave or compassionate leave. Employers may also, subject to their own affordability, furnish employees with living support such as medical protection, child care services, counselling services on stress or emotional management, setting up nursery room in the workplace to facilitate breastfeeding by working mothers, and organising recreational activities.

6. Putting FFEP in place can create a win-win situation for both employers and employees. In addition to relieving employees from work pressure and personal stress, these measures can help enterprises boost staff morale, facilitate employers in attracting and retaining talents, improve productivity, which will in turn enhance the image and competitiveness of the enterprises.

### **LD's promotional efforts**

7. LD has all along been adopting a three-pronged strategy to foster a family-friendly culture. The three-pronged strategy includes public education, publicity measures, and promotion of effective FFEP measures to suit unique business environments and operations of specific industries. Relevant promotional efforts are set out as follows.

#### Public education

8. Over the years, LD has organised a number of large-scale seminars to encourage employers to better understand employees' family needs with a view to adopting enlightened employment practices. Each of these seminars

attracted hundreds of participants including employers, representatives from employers' associations and human resources practitioners. In addition, LD often promotes these people-oriented management measures in talks featuring good people management practices. For instance, in the two seminars which attracted over 770 participants in 2015, information on new EO benefits and good employment practices including FFEP was disseminated. In the third quarter of 2015, LD will organise another thematic seminar for human resources managers and corporate executives. Academics specialising in human resources strategy and representatives of enterprises that have put in place FFEP are invited to share their insights in implementing relevant practices.

9. On public education, LD has already published two leaflets: one on introducing five-day work week and another on flexitime, plus a booklet illustrating various successful business cases on implementing FFEP. These publications serve as practical references and general guidelines for employers to put in place relevant measures. They have been sent to employers' associations (including associations for small and medium enterprises (SMEs)), trade unions and various types of enterprises; and disseminated to the public through various branch offices of LD, Public Enquiry Service Centres of the Home Affairs Department across the territory, and the Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs of the Trade and Industry Department. The electronic versions of these publications are also uploaded to LD's Homepage for public viewing. From time to time, LD has published feature articles in newspapers. For instance, in November 2014 and April 2015, articles illustrating that part-time work and work from home could facilitate employees to take care of their families and help employers attract and retain talents were published in two free newspapers respectively.

10. To further enhance publicity efforts in this regard, LD, partnering with the Hong Kong Economic Times, is publishing between June and September 2015 a series of news supplements on successful experiences of enterprises in implementing FFEP and the merits of such practices towards employers and employees. These news supplements should help pass on relevant messages to business executives and inspire them to integrate these good practices into their corporate employment policies. The series will be compiled into a casebook for extensive distribution to relevant companies and persons in the fourth quarter of 2015 to encourage wider adoption of FFEP.

## Publicity measures

11. To bring the FFEP messages into the community, LD has so far staged 53 roving exhibitions throughout the territory, displaying materials relating to FFEP and broadcasting promotional video, attracting some 150 000 members of the public. Furthermore, during the roving exhibitions, LD will distribute different kinds of promotional items to the public to reinforce the messages.

12. Making use of LD's extensive employers' network, catchy FFEP messages have also been disseminated through the periodic journals of major employers' associations and institutes of human resources management from time to time. Similar messages urging for mutual support and co-operation from every member of enterprises have also been publicized through the publications of trade union federations with a view to appealing to co-workers to jointly build a family-friendly workplace.

13. To expand the publicity effect of FFEP, LD has since 2014 started widely publicising different messages on FFEP, through placing advertisements in public transport networks. Recent campaigns included promoting flexitime, five-day work week, work from home and offering part-time alternatives through placing advertisements at bus shelters from February to March 2015 and on tram car bodies from June to July 2015 respectively.

## Industry-based FFEP promotion

14. To suit the unique business environments and operations of different industries, LD has been sharing effective means in implementing various kinds of FFEP through regular meetings with nine industry-based Tripartite Committees (TCs)<sup>1</sup> and 18 Human Resources Managers' Clubs (HRMCs)<sup>2</sup> covering various trades and industries. LD has also been circulating HRMC newsletters regularly to impress some 2 000 member organisations that a pro-family working environment can bring benefits to both enterprises and employees, thus achieving a win-win situation for employers and employees.

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<sup>1</sup> To promote tripartite dialogue and cooperation at the industry level, nine industry-based tripartite committees have been set up in the catering, retail, logistics, property management, hotel and tourism, construction, cement and concrete, theatre and printing industries. These committees provide useful forums for members to discuss industry-specific labour issues of common concern.

<sup>2</sup> 18 HRMCs are formed in various industries and trades including banking, building service, catering, construction, electronics, garment, logistics, manufacturing, retail, services, trading, community & social services organisations, education institutes, health care & personal services, hotel & tourism, information technology, property management and security services as well as one set up for SMEs.

15. Considering the characteristics of working hours and holiday arrangements in the service sector, some industries may face greater obstacle in making FFEP arrangements. In August 2014, LD invited academics from the field of business, economic and public policy to discuss with members of TC and HRMC of the retail trade their difficulties and challenges including manpower shortage in the trade with a view to assisting participants to formulate suitable good people management policies and FFEP. In the process, corporate executives generally recognised that even though putting FFEP into practice might cost enterprises, these measures would effectively enhance staff loyalty and reduce recruitment and training costs. With returns of FFEP outweighing its costs in the long run, there is a business case for enterprises to support carrying out such practices.

16. LD is also collaborating with employers and employees in the catering industry. A special working group comprising representatives from employers' associations, employers, trade unions, academics and the Government was set up in mid-2014. Through questionnaire survey, focus group meetings and in-depth interviews, the working group collected views and data of stakeholders in the catering industry. By consolidating and making reference to the observations and exemplary good people management strategies collected, the working group will devise a set of industry-based practical guidelines for employers in the catering industry to design their family-friendly working environment. It is expected that the practical guidelines for the catering industry will be introduced in the fourth quarter of 2015. Employers in the industry will be invited to attend a launching ceremony of the practical guidelines so as to enlist their support of relevant practices.

#### Support promotional efforts by other organisations

17. LD also supports the effort made by other organisations in promoting FFEP. The Family Council, with the support of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), has been encouraging employers to implement family-friendly employment policies and practices and fostering a pro-family culture and environment. Since 2011, the Family Council and HAB have launched the biennial "Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme" (the Award Scheme) to give recognition to companies/organisations which attach importance to family-friendly spirit and encourage them to institute more diversified family-friendly employment policies and practices to help employees balance

their work and family responsibilities. The 2013/14 Award Scheme received an overwhelming support with over 1 800 companies/organisations enrolled, representing an increase of more than 60% when compared with the first Award Scheme<sup>3</sup>. This showed that more companies/organisations had recognised the importance of family-friendly employment policies and practices. Examples of family-friendly employment policies and practices adopted by the award winners included five-day week, flexible working locations and hours, provision of breastfeeding facilities in the workplace, establishment of scholarships for the children of employees, and granting of special leaves such as “parental leave” and “filial leave”. Through sharing of the valuable experience of these employers in implementing family-friendly employment policies and practices, the Award Scheme has helped enhance public awareness of family-friendly employment policies and practices and encourage more employers to implement them in the workplace.

18. Riding on the success of the Award Schemes in 2011 and 2013/14, the Family Council and HAB will launch the third Award Scheme in December 2015 to continue to promote the wider implementation of family-friendly employment policies and practices in different sectors and industries through a series of promotional and educational activities. Apart from the “Family-Friendly Employers” and “Distinguished Family-Friendly Employers” award categories in the previous Award Schemes, a new award category entitled “Award for Breastfeeding Support” will be given to companies/organisations which have adopted a breastfeeding-friendly workplace policy for their lactating employees. The Family Council and HAB will endeavour to use the Award Scheme as a platform to foster a family-friendly culture in the community and to share good family-friendly practices adopted by the awardees with employers from different sectors.

## **Conclusion**

19. To foster a pro-family culture in workplaces requires the cooperation of various parties. Employees are the most valuable asset of the company while families are a source of support and strength for employees. As mentioned above, promoting FFEP can boost staff morale, enhance employer-employee relationship as well as improve productivity and

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<sup>3</sup> 1 112 companies participated in the 2011 Award Scheme.

competitiveness for employers, hence achieving a win-win situation. Cultivating a family-friendly employment culture and working environment has become an increasingly important task. With the strenuous efforts of relevant parties, more and more employers have now recognised the importance of building a family-friendly workplace and the number of employers implementing FFEP has been on the rise. LD will continue to work with various stakeholders to promote FFEP through different publicity channels and promotional activities.

Labour and Welfare Bureau

Labour Department

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