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27 April 2016

Ms Betty Ma
Clerk to Panel on Manpower
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms Ma,

**Panel on Manpower
Measures to promote the employment of mature persons**

At the meeting of Panel on Manpower held on 17 November 2015, the Administration advised the Panel that the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") had commissioned a market research on the training needs of mature persons to gauge their demand for ERB courses and services as well as gather the opinions of employers on recruitment of mature persons ("the market research"). The Administration was requested to provide the report on the market research.

2. The concerned market research was completed earlier this year. We herewith attach at **Annex** a summary of the research result and observation of the research institution, as well as ERB's follow-up actions, for Members' reference.

Yours sincerely,

(Daniel Fong)
for Secretary for Labour and Welfare

c.c. Employees Retraining Board (Attention: Mr Stanley Ng)
Commissioner for Labour (Attention: Ms Alice Yeung)

“Study on the Training Needs of Mature Persons” –
Research Findings

Background

Hong Kong is facing the problem of an ageing population in recent years. To mitigate the adverse impact of an ageing population and shrinking labour force, the Government actively encourages the latent labour force, including mature persons, to enter the employment market.

2. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has commissioned the Institute of Active Ageing of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (research institution) to conduct a “Study on the Training Needs of Mature Persons” (Study) to gauge the needs of mature persons for the training courses and services offered by ERB as well as the views and attitudes of employers towards the employment of mature persons. The Study aimed to provide observations and recommendations on:

- (a) the training needs and expectations of mature persons; and
- (b) the obstacles encountered by mature persons in seeking jobs, and the considerations of employers in recruiting mature persons.

Research Methodology

3. The research institution conducted focus group meetings (4 groups) and undertook telephone interviews (304 interviews) to collect views from 343 mature persons who were aged 50 or above with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below, and who were prepared to seek jobs in the next 12 months or were in employment at the time of survey. The research institution also conducted in-depth interviews (34 interviews) to collect views from 34 employers who would engage mature persons with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below.

Key Research Findings

4. On the training needs and expectations, the Study revealed that mature persons in general would like to:

- (a) enroll in courses on computers, post-natal care, security services, and healthcare;
- (b) attend courses delivered in half-day mode (morning or evening sessions preferred); and
- (c) attend classes in weekdays for not more than 3 days per week.

5. On the obstacles encountered by mature persons in seeking jobs and the considerations of employers in recruiting mature persons, the Study observed that:

(a) Physical agility and faculty of memory: Due to declining physical agility, ability to learn, and faculty of memory, mature persons may have difficulty in adapting to new jobs. On the other hand, employers are concerned with the higher risks of occupational injuries/diseases in connection with the employment of mature persons.

(b) Computer and communication skills: Some mature persons cannot master computer application skills and the use of English language. Without relevant work experience, they also find it difficult to seek employment in industries they aspire to join. But employers generally accord relatively greater importance to work attitudes, English proficiency and communication skills of employees, and expect them to possess basic computer skills before they land on jobs.

(c) Adjustment of mind set: Failure in job search often undermines the confidence of mature persons, and criticism received whilst at work ruins their dignity. Employers consider that mature persons wish to be respected and be given “face”. They may have difficulty in adjusting their mind set to prepare for employment in the service industries.

(d) Matching of jobs with needs or expectations: Mature persons worry that their job opportunities are limited by their educational background and family commitments, and wish to engage in jobs that match their abilities and expertise. On the other hand, employers consider that work attitude as well as work experience and skill sets commensurate with the jobs concerned are more important than educational qualifications. Some industries will consider recruiting mature persons on a part-time basis.

(e) Perceptions of society: Some mature persons perceive their age as the major obstacle to employment and worry that employers may have pre-conceived ideas that they are unwilling to take up new things or get used to computer technology, and are insistent on their own opinions. Employers consider that people of different age possess equal employment opportunity, whilst mature persons have their own competitive advantages such as mature personality and reasonable expectation towards remuneration. However, they are often accustomed to a fixed work pattern and may face problems in coping with changes.

(f) Economic considerations: Employees' compensation insurance premium for mature persons is relatively high and this may weaken the motivation of employers to recruit mature persons. In the light of a relatively shorter lead time to retirement, employers may have less incentive to provide on-the-job training to employees of higher age. Mature persons consider that the statutory minimum wage has generated additional workload on them, resulting in a rising demand on their physical agility and adaptability. On the other hand, employers consider that owing to resources constraints of small and medium enterprises, it is more difficult for mature persons with limited experience to be recruited for jobs with higher skills requirements, so they usually land on elementary jobs with higher labour intensity and lower skills requirements.

(g) Channels for job search and recruitment: Mature persons mainly source job information from traditional channels such as newspapers and bills/posters

in public areas. Nevertheless, in recent years, apart from elementary jobs, the majority of job vacancies are advertised on the Internet. Some jobseekers may therefore be unable to acquire the relevant information. As such, employers may seldom receive applications from mature persons and hence may not possess sufficient information to assess their background and work expectations, and are not in a position to match the jobs for them.

Recommendations Pertaining to Training Courses

6. On the development of training courses for mature persons, the research institution recommends:

- (a) providing training on occupational safety and health;
- (b) introducing career planning and assessment;
- (c) offering courses on computer application, vocational languages, job search skills, and interpersonal and communications skills; and
- (d) strengthening pre-employment and on-the-job counseling services.

7. On the design of training courses for mature persons, the research institution recommends:

- (a) organising classes of smaller size with trainees segmented by age and educational attainment;
- (b) flexibly arranging teaching facilities and classroom setting;
- (c) adopting interactive teaching methods with equal emphasis on theoretical and practical training;
- (d) assessing learning outcomes through both written and practical skills assessments;
- (e) equipping trainers with classroom leadership skills, and considering the appointment of experienced mature trainers as appropriate;
- (f) providing training materials in larger font size; and
- (g) providing mature persons with financial subsidies in accordance with their income level when they enroll in courses with higher course fees.

Follow-up Actions

8. In response to the recommendations of the research institution, ERB will take follow-up actions on training services as below:

- (a) to develop a series of dedicated courses in “Foundation Certificate in Workplace Re-entry” for mature persons, with contents covering prevailing circumstances of the employment market, adjustment of mind set, and training of vocational skills;
- (b) to explore with stakeholders the design of dedicated courses for mature persons, including class size, teaching timetable, training facilities and activities, assessment mode, etc.;
- (c) to organise tailor-made courses for mature persons in collaboration with employers; and
- (d) to provide training materials in larger font size for existing courses.

9. Follow-up actions on support and ancillary services include:

- (a) to organise the “Workplace Re-entry Activity Series” to enable mature persons to understand the entry requirements and opportunities of development , and to gain first-hand knowledge on the working environment and job duties;
- (b) to organise the “Workshops on Enhancing the Awareness Towards Mature Persons” to assist interested employers to understand the characteristics of mature persons and master the related communication skills;
- (c) to organise the “Recruitment Sharing Sessions” to encourage enterprises to recruit mature persons on completion of training of ERB;
- (d) to conduct thematic studies on the recruitment and training of mature persons by enterprises; and
- (e) to organise district-based promotional activities for mature persons including job fairs and seminars.

Employees Retraining Board

April 2016