

Legislative Council meeting of 29 May 2019
Motion on ‘Supporting elderly persons aged between 60 and 64
on all fronts’

Progress Report

Purpose

At the Legislative Council meeting of 29 May 2019, the motion on ‘Supporting elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 on all fronts’ moved by Hon KWOK Wai-keung as amended by Prof Hon Joseph LEE and Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG was passed. The full text of the motion is at **Annex**. This paper briefs Members on the related developments.

Facilitating Employment of Mature Persons

2. In view of the improved life expectancy and health conditions of the population in Hong Kong, there would be more mature persons participating in the labour market. In particular, the labour force participation rate for the age group of 60 to 64 has a notable increase in the past ten years. Specifically, it increased from 32% in 2008 to 47% in 2018. The number of employed persons increased from around 95 000 in 2008 to 250 000 in 2018. In this connection, the Government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to facilitate employment of mature persons.

Training for Mature Persons

3. On training programmes for mature persons, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) currently offers around 700 training courses covering 28 industry categories and generic skills training for eligible persons aged 15 or above (including those aged 60 to 64). It also provides dedicated training courses for persons aged 50 or above with a view to upgrading their employment-related skills. In 2018-19, the number of trainees aged 60 to 64 enrolled in ERB training courses was around 19 000, accounting for around 15% of the total number of enrolment.

4. To step up the effort for unleashing the potential workforce amongst the mature population, ERB has launched various key initiatives in 2019-20 on the training and employment support for mature persons, including the ‘Post-50 Branding Campaign’, ‘Post-50 Internship

Programme’ and ‘Post-50 Love Upgrading Scheme’ starting from June 2019. Amongst them, the ‘Post-50 Love Upgrading Scheme’ allows, during June to August 2019, ‘Post-50s’ to apply for one half-day or evening non-placement-tied course free of charge, and it suitably relaxes the limitation on educational attainment for enrolment with a view to encouraging them to learn about and apply for ERB courses.

5. Separately, a series of enhancement measures have been implemented under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) since 1 April 2019, including the increase of CEF subsidy ceiling to \$20,000 per applicant, raising the age limit for applicants to 70, expanding the scope of CEF courses to all eligible courses registered in Qualifications Register etc., and re-activating closed CEF accounts so that applicants who have applied subsidy before could also be benefited. All these measures also benefit persons aged 60 to 64 by greatly increasing their choices and flexibility of continuing learning.

Employment Support Services for Mature Persons

6. To support the employment of mature job seekers, the Labour Department (LD) has implemented various measures such as staging large-scale job fairs for the elderly and middle-aged, setting up special counters and organising district-based job fairs on part-time employment as well as employment briefings for them in its job centres, establishing a dedicated webpage on LD’s Interactive Employment Service website, etc. to facilitate these job seekers to access up-to-date employment information for searching suitable job vacancies. LD will continue to strengthen its liaison with non-government organisations (NGOs) and encourage them to refer mature job seekers to LD for employment support services.

Encouraging Employers to Hire Mature Persons

7. LD has all along been encouraging employers, having regard to the individual circumstances of their enterprises, to adopt friendly employment practices for mature persons, including extending the permissible working age of their employees and adopting more flexible modes of employment, etc., so as to establish suitable working conditions and environment to attract mature persons to stay in or return to employment. LD will continue to, through various promotional activities, raise public awareness on the potential labour force of mature persons and encourage employers to adopt friendly employment practices

for mature persons. Channels to promote these messages include widely distributing themed publications, staging roving exhibitions, publishing feature articles in newspapers, placing advertisements in the public transport network and broadcasting television and radio Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs), etc.

8. To encourage employers to hire mature job seekers aged 60 or above and provide them with on-the-job training, LD has enhanced the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged and renamed it as the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM) in September 2018. Employers engaging mature job seekers aged 60 or above who are unemployed or have left the workforce are offered a monthly on-the-job training allowance up to \$4,000 per employee for a period of six to 12 months¹ under EPEM. EPEM covers both full-time and part-time jobs. LD will continue to promote EPEM proactively through various channels to encourage more employers to provide suitable job vacancies for mature job seekers.

Eliminating Age Discrimination in Employment

9. The Government has always been encouraging employers to adopt the principle of ‘Count On Talent, Not Age In Employment’ and adopt consistent selection criteria to assess the abilities of job seekers or employees. LD has issued the Practical Guidelines for Employers on Eliminating Age Discrimination in Employment since January 2006, setting forth the best practices for eliminating age discrimination in recruitment and workplace. To enhance public awareness on the importance of eliminating age discrimination in employment, LD will continue to promote equal employment through various measures, such as broadcasting television and radio APIs and distributing the Practical Guidelines and leaflets to the public and employers.

Mandatory Provident Fund Arrangements for Retired Persons who Re-join the Labour Market

10. As regards the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) arrangements for retired persons who re-join the labour market, according to the information provided by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the protection under MPF system would not be affected for those who

¹ The maximum amount of on-the-job training allowance for engaging each unemployed job seeker aged 40 to 59 remains \$3,000 per month for a period of three to six months.

aged 60 to 64 who have withdrawn MPF contributions on grounds of early retirement but subsequently re-join the labour market. If this group of mature persons re-join the labour market as an employee, employers are required to enrol them in an MPF scheme and make contributions. Alternatively, if they re-join the labour market as a self-employed person, they are required to enrol themselves in an MPF scheme and make their own contributions.

11. To increase savings for retirement, the Government encourages both employers and employees to consider making voluntary contributions apart from mandatory contributions. To this end, starting from 1 April 2019, eligible persons² may open a tax deductible voluntary contribution (TVC) account and make TVC for enjoying tax deductions with a deduction cap at \$60,000³ per year. There is no age limit for applying tax deductions on TVC, which means that eligible persons aged 60 or above are also covered by such arrangement.

Welfare Initiatives and Medical Services

Social Security

12. With the growing elder population, it is expected that the number of beneficiaries and financial commitment involved in various elderly social security payments will continue to increase. Having regard to the sustainability of the social security system, the Government has no plans to lower the age criteria for the relevant allowances. As a matter of fact, the Government's expenditure in social security has been increasing. In 2019-20, the estimated recurrent expenditure in social security (including the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme) is around \$54 billion, which represents a nearly 50% increase from the \$37 billion five years ago. This clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment.

Public Transport Fare Concession

13. As regards the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities

² Refer to members with contribution accounts or personal accounts of MPF schemes, or members of MPF Exempted Occupational Retirement Schemes.

³ This is an aggregate limit for both qualifying deferred annuity premiums and TVC.

(Concession Scheme) mentioned in the motion, it enables elderly persons aged 65 or above to travel on designated public transport modes and services at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip with no cap on the amounts of reimbursed subsidy per trip or per month. Currently, there are about 1.3 million elderly persons aged 65 or above eligible for the Concession Scheme. In view of the possible multiple increase in elderly population in the foreseeable future, the Government estimates that public expenditure on the Concession Scheme will increase substantially.

14. While the Government has no plans to lower the eligible age of the above schemes to 60, we will keep in view the operation of the schemes and introduce improvement measures in a targeted manner at appropriate junctures.

Medical Services

Elderly Health Centres and Visiting Health Teams

15. According to the information provided by the Food and Health Bureau, there are 18 Elderly Health Centres (EHCs), one in each district, operated by the Elderly Health Service (EHS) of the Department of Health (DH). The EHCs mainly provide integrated primary health care services comprising health assessment, physical examination, health education, individual counselling, and medical treatment to elderly persons aged 65 or above on a membership basis. Persons aged below 65 who are not eligible for membership may still join the EHCs' health education activities free of charge to learn relevant disease prevention and self-management skills.

16. In addition, the 18 Visiting Health Teams (VHTs) of the EHS reach out into the community and residential care settings to provide health promotion activities for elderly persons and their carers in collaboration with other elderly services providers, there is no age restrictions for joining these activities. Besides, to support ageing in place, the VHTs are collaborating with the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) to conduct targeted health promotion activities and self-management training for residents aged 60 or above of around 20 public housing estates under the HKHS who have specific health problems such as diabetes, hypertension, and risk of falls.

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

17. Regarding seasonal influenza (SI) vaccination, the Government has been providing free or subsidised SI vaccination for eligible high-risk individuals under the Government Vaccination Programme (GVP) and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme (VSS). The GVP, while providing free SI vaccination for persons aged 65 or above, also provides free vaccination for persons aged 50 to 64 who are recipients of CSSA or holders of a valid Certificate for Waiver of Medical Charges. The Government has also expanded the eligible group of the VSS to cover Hong Kong residents aged 50 to 64 in 2018-19.

Dental Services

18. On dental services, the Government launched a three-year pilot project in 2011 to provide basic dental care (covering oral examination, scaling and polishing, and emergency dental treatments) for elderly persons residing in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) or receiving services in day care centres for the elderly (DEs) through subventing outreach dental teams set up by NGOs. Having regard to the experience gained, the Government regularised the pilot project (entitled 'Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly' (ODCP)) in October 2014 to continue with the provision of outreach dental services for eligible elderly persons with expanded scope of dental treatments covering fillings, extractions and dentures, etc. The pool of beneficiaries was also expanded to cover persons aged 60 or above with Hong Kong Identity Card who are residing or receiving services in RCHEs, DEs and similar facilities (e.g. Nursing Homes for the elderly registered under the DH). Between October 2014 and May 2019, the number of attendances under ODCP was about 200 000.

Encouraging Mature Persons to actively participate in the Community

19. The Government has been working closely with different service units and district organisations to encourage mature persons to actively participate in the community and to live a fruitful life in their golden years. Among others, the Elder Academy (EA) Scheme encourages cross-sectoral collaboration between school sponsoring bodies and elderly service units to set up EAs in primary and secondary schools, as well as post-secondary institutions to promote lifelong learning. EAs are mainly targeted for persons aged 60 or above and the curricular of which largely depend on the interests and needs of residents in the district.

Programmes offered by EAs include academic course, interest class, healthcare-related programmes, etc. At present, about 140 EAs have been set up and these EAs altogether provide more than 10 000 learning places each year.

Conclusion

20. The Government will continue to support mature persons in various aspects. Apart from encouraging those who are capable of work to participate in the labour market, the Government will, at appropriate junctures, introduce measures in cash assistance, medical services and other related aspects to support needy persons in a targeted manner.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau
Food and Health Bureau
July 2019

(Translation)

**Motion on
‘Supporting elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 on all fronts’
moved by Hon KWOK Wai-keung
at the Council meeting of 29 May 2019**

Motion as amended by Prof Hon Joseph LEE and Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG

That given the absence of a statutory retirement age in Hong Kong at present, quite a number of employees are forced to retire upon reaching the age of 60; it is often difficult for them to rejoin the labour market after retirement due to such factors as age, physical conditions, inadequacy of suitable job positions and age discrimination, and as the age thresholds for application for most social services and welfare benefits for the elderly provided by the Government are 65 or above, elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 are unable to receive such support; in this connection, this Council urges the Government to comprehensively collect information on elderly persons aged above 60 in such respects as health, employment and finance, in order to formulate focused policies based on accurate statistics and at the same time review the elderly policies and services of various departments and support elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 on all fronts, such as employment, welfare, healthcare and transport, including:

- (1) enacting legislation against age discrimination in workplace;
- (2) formulating rules and regulations on re-employment of elderly retirees and rationalizing the Mandatory Provident Fund arrangements, so as to enhance the employment protection for elderly persons aged between 60 and 64;
- (3) enhancing the employment support for elderly persons aged between 60 and 64, providing designated employment programmes and retraining courses for them, and encouraging the provision of more job positions and industries suitable for the elderly in the market;
- (4) offering subsidies to elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 who have taken up employment again as well as their employers, and providing the \$2 concessionary transport fare to elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 to further motivate them to take

up employment again;

- (5) adjusting the age requirements for various types of elderly welfare for the benefit of elderly persons aged between 60 and 64, including the Elderly Health Care Vouchers, the Old Age Living Allowance, the Old Age Allowance and the Elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance;
- (6) formulating measures and allocating resources to motivate elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 to actively participate in neighbourhood mutual help activities, volunteer work and social affairs in the community, thereby encouraging them to make continuous contribution to society;
- (7) lowering the age for enrolment as members of elderly health centres of the Department of Health to 60, so that elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 are eligible for using the services of elderly health centres;
- (8) lowering the eligible age for receiving free/subsidized seasonal influenza vaccination and pneumococcal vaccination under the Government's vaccination schemes to 60, so that elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 can receive these vaccinations for free or with subsidies; and
- (9) enhancing the provision of dental and audiological services for elderly persons aged between 60 and 64;
- (10) setting up a task force to study the development of silver hair industries, encouraging elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 to develop a second career according to their ability, experience and interests, and establishing a silver hair business start-up fund to provide funding, coaching, information technology, social networking support, etc. to elderly persons who aspire to start their own business (especially those aged between 60 and 64); and
- (11) cooperating with the Mainland Government to conduct a study on planning and building new communities that can facilitate leisurely retirement life on the Mainland, especially in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area, to enable elderly retirees aged between 60 and 64 in Hong Kong to move to the Mainland to enjoy quality retirement life.