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Panel on Manpower

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 19 February 2019**

Employment services of the Labour Department

Purpose

This paper provides background information and summarizes the past discussions by the Panel on Manpower ("the Panel") 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, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction 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 specialized employment programmes under which 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 organized to facilitate job seekers to apply for jobs and attend interviews with employers on the spot.

Deliberations of the Panel

Employment support for mature persons

4. According to the Administration, the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("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, EPM were extended to cover part-time permanent jobs (i.e. working 18 hours to less than 30 hours per week) with effect from 1 September 2015. While welcoming the programme, some members called on the Administration to consider increasing the amount of the on-the-job training allowance so as to encourage employers to engage more mature job seekers.

5. Some members expressed the view that support measures taken by the Administration should focus on the retirees when promoting employment of mature persons. The Administration should also adopt measures to encourage employers to provide flexible work arrangements and part-time jobs for mature job seekers.

6. According to the Administration, some of the mature persons were reluctant to re-join the labour market simply because of long working hours and some of them would prefer part-time jobs. To encourage employers to provide more part-time posts to mature job seekers, LD had been encouraging employers to provide the mature employees with a family-friendly working environment with flexible and various work arrangements and support. It also regularly organized employment briefings for mature persons and experience sharing sessions for employers. In addition, LD had set up a dedicated webpage on part-time vacancies at iES website to facilitate job seekers interested in part-time employment. LD would also continue organizing district-based job fairs on part-time employment at job centres to meet the needs of mature persons who were more interested in taking up part-time jobs.

Employment assistance to young people

7. Members expressed concern that the unemployment rate of young people was relatively higher than the overall unemployment rate in Hong Kong. Concern was raised about the employment support and training services to young people. The Administration advised that the Youth Employment and Training Programme ("YETP") launched by LD provided one-stop pre-employment and on-the-job training for young school leavers aged 15 to 24

with educational attainment at sub-degree level 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. Given the low participation rate of YETP in recent years, some members called on the Administration to consider commissioning an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive review of the programme. The Administration responded that LD had reviewed YETP from time to time. Under YETP, LD had been working closely with training organizations to tailor-make training-cum-employment projects for employers of various industries. Members were also advised that the lower participation rate of YETP in recent years was partly attributed to the decrease in population of the target age group of 15-24 and the increasing opportunities for these young people to pursue further studies. In addition, as a result of the vibrant economy in the past few years, young job seekers could find jobs in the employment market more easily and fewer of them sought employment assistance from LD under YETP.

9. Members were advised that following the launch of a new project "Career Kick-start" under YETP in the second quarter of 2017, young people with acute employment difficulties were offered on-the-job training of 12 months through placements in non-government organizations ("NGOs"). Some members were concerned about the work nature of the placements and whether such work experience could enable the young people to secure employment with better remuneration in future.

10. The Administration explained that the objective of placing young people in NGOs under "Career Kick-start" was to enable these young trainees with acute employment difficulties to gain work experience and enrich their personal credentials for seeking employment in the open market. Special employment projects in various fields like aviation and e-learning were launched from time to time to meet the aspirations of young people and help them build their career path in different trades/industries.

Women employment

11. Members had all along called for the provision of adequate child care services so as to release the female homemakers to join the labour force. In addition, more resources should be provided by the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") to equip the female homemakers 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.

12. The Administration further advised that to remove the barriers for women to stay in employment and to further respond to the community demand for child care services, it had been launching a series of measures to strengthen the existing child care services. These included the provision of, 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. Moreover, the Administration would commission a consultancy study to advise on strategies for the long-term development of child care services with a view to providing services that would meet the needs of the families in Hong Kong.

Employment support for persons with disabilities

13. Noting that a considerable number of persons with disabilities remained unemployed after having repeatedly sought employment, some members asked whether the Government, as the largest employer in Hong Kong, would consider giving priority in engaging job seekers with disabilities who had registered at LD to fill vacancies in the civil service. Some members were concerned that the number of civil servants known with disabilities had decreased from 3 256 to 3 230 during the period of 2006 to 2016 as opposed to an overall increase of about 11 000 in the strength of the civil service in the same period. These members raised concern about the Administration's efforts in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities and whether it would consider requiring large enterprises to employ a specified percentage or a specific number of employees with disabilities.

14. The Administration advised that it had all along been committed to promoting the employment of persons with disabilities through various publicity channels. The Administration had also been approaching employers in various trades and industries and working with the Human Resources Managers Clubs to enhance the employment prospect of job seekers with disabilities and would continue to work in such direction. In respect of helping job seekers with disabilities registered with LD to apply for government posts, LD had been keeping watch for recruitment notices posted on the website of the Civil Service Bureau and would disseminate such information to both able-bodied job seekers and those with disabilities. As regards the number of civil servants known with disabilities, the Administration explained that there was no mandatory requirement under the prevailing policy for government employees or job applicants to declare their disability status (if any), and such practice was in line

with the Code of Practice on Employment issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission. Hence, the statistics so collected only reflected the information made available to the departmental management.

15. Having regard to the diverse needs for various categories of job seekers with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, behavioural or emotional problems and physical disabilities, some members were concerned about the specific employment support for them. According to the Administration, LD launched a two-year pilot project in September 2016 to engage a non-governmental welfare organization to provide in-depth psychological and emotional counselling service to needy job seekers. The scheme served to alleviate emotional problems of job seekers with disabilities arising from the state of their disabilities or their personal or family matters, so as to help them concentrate on job search and settle in their new jobs, thereby releasing their potentials in employment. LD would review the pilot scheme upon its completion and map out the way forward in light of the review findings.

16. To provide job seekers with disabilities with coaching and support, LD implemented the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme ("WOPS") under which employers would be granted an allowance of up to \$5,500 per month during the three-month work adaptation period. Thereafter, employers might continue to draw an allowance of up to \$4,000 per month for a maximum of six months. Members noted with concern that employment of about 40% of employees with disabilities under WOPS had been terminated in the first three months. Members were concerned about the number of WOPS participants who would have stayed in employment after the expiry of the allowance period and whether there were any follow-up services for these participants.

17. According to the Administration, about one-third of the participants had remained in the same post at the ninth month of employment under WOPS, i.e. after the expiry of allowance period. Through follow-up services, LD noted that most of the termination cases involved participants quitting the job on their own accord due to various reasons. That said, to encourage employers to offer employment opportunities to job seekers with disabilities and to assist these job seekers to settle in their new jobs, LD had extended the work adaptation period from two months to three months during which employers would be granted a higher rate of allowance.

Employment assistance to ethnic minorities

18. Members expressed concern about the high unemployment rate of the ethnic minorities ("EMs") job seekers and sought information on the specific

measures in place to address the employment difficulties of EM job seekers, such as language barrier and cultural difference.

19. According to the Administration, LD's job centres had been maintaining close contact with NGOs serving EMs, EM religious bodies and schools with EM students in disseminating updated employment information to EMs regularly and encouraging them to refer EMs with employment needs to LD for employment services. To help EMs better understand the latest labour market situation and facilitate them to browse vacancy information, key information of all job vacancies was translated and displayed bilingually on iES website, its mobile application and vacancy search terminals of LD equipped with touch-screen interface. In addition, leaflets on LD's employment services for EMs were printed in various ethnic languages and posters regarding the provision of interpretation services to job seekers were displayed in all LD's job centres in which interpretation service would be arranged as necessary. Moreover, to strengthen employment support for EM job seekers, especially those of South Asian origins, LD had engaged two employment assistants to provide employment services at Kowloon West Job Centre in Sham Shui Po and Employment in One-stop in Tin Shui Wai on a pilot basis since May 2017. These employment assistants conversant with EM languages and cultures were able to identify suitable vacancies in the job market for EM job seekers as well as help LD proactively reach out to and encourage EMs with employment needs to make use of LD's employment services.

20. Some members were of the view that the Administration should consider recruiting EMs as placement officers at LD's job centres to enhance communication with EM job seekers. Members were advised that LD launched a pilot project "Employment Services Ambassador ("ESA") Programme for Ethnic Minorities" in September 2014 to engage trainees of YETP who could communicate in EM languages as ESAs at LD's job centres, industry-based recruitment centres and job fairs to undergo six-month on-the-job training. The programme not only helped LD better serve EM job seekers but also enriched ESAs' own working experience and resume, benefiting their job search in the open market.

21. Some members noted with concern that although staff of job fairs and industry-based recruitment centres had introduced interpretation services to some 2 800 EM job seekers, such services were arranged on 20 occasions only in 2017. Moreover, only 1 036 EM job seekers had registered for LD's employment services in the same year. These members were concerned about the low usage of the interpretation services by EM job seekers and the relatively small number of EM job seekers who had registered for LD's employment services.

22. The Administration advised that staff at LD's job centres/industry-based recruitment centres would proactively introduce free interpretation service to EM job seekers. Notwithstanding this, most of the EM job seekers did not require the service as they could communicate in English or Chinese, while some of them were assisted by accompanying friends. The Administration further advised that the vast majority of vacancies advertised through LD were made available on LD's iES webpage and were open for direct application by job seekers. Job seekers could obtain the relevant job vacancy information and employers' contact means through the webpage. In applying for these vacancies, they needed not register with LD or report their application result to LD. LD therefore was not able to capture the placement figures in full for all registered EM job seekers.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 February 2019

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>
	17.11.2015 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
16.2.2016 (Items III and IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>	

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
	15.3.2016 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	15.11.2016 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	16.1.2018 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	16.10.2018 (Item III)	<u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services (Joint meeting)	9.12.2013 (Item II)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>

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