

For information
25 June 2019

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Manpower for the Elderly Care Service Sector

Purpose

Pursuant to the suggestion from some Members, the Panel on Manpower will convene a meeting on 25 June 2019 to discuss the captioned issue. This paper briefs Members on the current manpower situation of the elderly care service sector, and the measures taken by the Government to enhance the manpower supply for residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs). In fact, the Government has commissioned a survey to gauge the manpower situation of the elderly care service sector, and will consider the need for more effective strategies and new initiatives to help address the labour shortage issue, especially in terms of the shortage of frontline care staff for RCHEs.

Manpower in Elderly Care Service Sector

2. Individual sectors are encountering human resources shortage and recruitment difficulties. With the extremely tight overall labour force and a rapidly ageing population, the situation of the elderly care service sector is particularly acute. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) conducted a manpower survey on subsidised elderly and rehabilitation service units in 2017 (the 2017 survey) to gauge the manpower situation of frontline care staff. The results showed that the vacancy rate of relevant posts, including personal care workers (PCWs) and home helpers (HHs), reached 18%.

3. The Government is very concerned about the manpower situation of the elderly care service sector, which is an important factor affecting the standard and quality of services for our elderly residents in RCHEs. SWD has been implementing multi-pronged measures to enhance the manpower supply and improve the work conditions and prospects of the sector. Amongst them, to enable subsidised welfare service units to recruit and retain staff more effectively, the Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Agenda stated that additional resources would be provided for subsidised elderly, rehabilitation and family and child welfare service units to increase the salary provision for

recognised posts of PCWs, ward attendants (WAs) and HHs. This measure was implemented by SWD in 2018.

4. SWD conducted another survey on subsidised service units, including elderly, rehabilitation and family and child welfare service units, earlier this year (the 2019 survey) to gauge the impact of the use of the SWD's additional resources by the subsidised service units to increase the remuneration of staff, as mentioned in paragraph 3 above, on the manpower situation of frontline care staff. SWD will conduct an in-depth analysis of the data collected with a view to mapping out the proposed way forward.

5. The above notwithstanding, preliminary reading of the information to hand has revealed that even with the increase of emoluments (including salaries and allowances) of frontline care staff in 2018, the vacancy rate of the posts of PCWs, WAs and HHs in subsidised service units is still about 19%, which is higher than the vacancy rate as revealed in the 2017 survey. As mentioned above, SWD will conduct an in-depth analysis of different data collected in the 2019 survey, with a view to reviewing the manpower shortage situation of the elderly care service sector and devising recommendations for the way forward.

Measures for Enhancing Manpower Supply for the Elderly Care Service Sector

6. In addition to the provision of additional resources to increase the remuneration of the elderly care service staff as mentioned in paragraph 3 above, the Government has introduced various measures to enhance the manpower supply. Details are set out below.

The Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services

7. SWD launched the Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services (Navigation Scheme) in July 2015, providing a total of 1 000 training places by phases starting from 2015-16, to encourage young people to join the elderly and rehabilitation care services. Young persons who have completed Form 5 education or possess an equivalent qualification are eligible to participate. Apart from receiving on-the-job training in the elderly or rehabilitation service units, the young persons recruited under the Navigation Scheme are provided subsidies from the Government to pursue a two-year part-time diploma course. As at end-December 2018, a total of 1 018 trainees were recruited under the Navigation Scheme. Among them, 314 trainees graduated.

8. In 2019-20, the operating agencies will continue to recruit trainees according to their own course schedules and are expected to provide 200 additional training places. SWD will continue to provide a total of 1 200 additional training places within five years starting from 2020-21 under an enhanced scheme to attract young people to enrol in the Navigation Scheme, and encourage them to join the elderly and rehabilitation care services. Enhancement measures include expanding the age range of trainees, reducing the working hours per week for trainees to further their studies more effectively, and raising their salaries, with a view to attracting more young people to join the social welfare care sector.

Implementation of the Qualifications Framework

9. Implementation of the Qualifications Framework (QF) in the elderly care service sector provides clearer progression pathways for a brighter future for practitioners, and helps attract more newcomers to join the relevant services. The Education Bureau set up the Elderly Care Service Industry Training Advisory Committee (ITAC) in 2012 to assist the elderly care service sector to implement QF.

10. ITAC developed the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) for elderly care service sector in 2014. SCS spells out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of practitioners in various job functions in the industry. Training providers are encouraged to develop SCS-based courses for practitioners to enhance their competitiveness through continuing education and learning. Furthermore, ITAC launched the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism in the elderly care service sector in 2015 to facilitate recognition of experience, knowledge and skills that practitioners have acquired in the workplace. ITAC also completed development of the Vocational Qualifications Pathway for the elderly care service sector in 2018. Learners or practitioners can progress at various levels through attainment or acquisition of the required occupation-based qualifications. At the same time, ITAC endeavours to attract new blood to join the sector by providing updates about the sector to teachers and students of senior forms in secondary schools through different channels.

11. To enhance the service quality of RCHEs and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), SWD launched a five-year scheme in phases in 2019 to provide full subsidies for home managers, health workers and care workers of all RCHEs and RCHDs in Hong Kong to enrol in QF-based training courses. SWD also plans to provide training subsidies for RCHEs and RCHDs so that proper manpower arrangements can be made to

maintain the operation while the health workers and care workers are taking the courses. On-site training support and assessment will also be provided for trainees. The entire scheme is anticipated to cover about 30 000 practitioners from over 1 000 RCHEs and RCHDs.

Training Services

12. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) implements various measures to meet the needs of the elderly care service sector. These include implementing the ‘First-Hire-Then-Train’ Scheme, to encourage middle-aged women and homemakers to land on jobs in RCHEs as care worker trainees. During the one-year contract period upon employment, trainees will in parallel receive on-the-job training. In addition, ERB has extended the coverage of ‘Modular Certificates Accumulation Scheme’ to encourage women who are unable to pursue full-time courses due to family commitments to make flexible study arrangements and acquire recognised qualifications. ERB will also continue to develop more new courses related to elderly services, optimise existing curriculum design, and produce online self-learning materials and organise thematic workshops to enhance practitioners’ professional knowledge.

13. Moreover, the Childcare, Elderly and Community Services Discipline under the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education of the Vocational Training Council provides two 2-year full-time pre-employment programmes in elderly care services, namely the Higher Diploma in Integrated Social and Health Services and the Higher Diploma in Community Service Planning and Navigation. These programmes facilitate learners to join the elderly care service and related sector upon graduation.

Employment Services

14. Employers of the elderly care service sector have been using the free employment services of the Labour Department (LD) to recruit staff. Upon receipt of job vacancy information from employers, LD widely publicises the vacancy information through various channels, including the 13 job centres, the Interactive Employment Service website and its mobile application, as well as the vacancy search terminals installed at various locations throughout the territory. Employers may also participate in large-scale job fairs or district-based job fairs organised by LD. Through conducting on-the-spot interviews at job fairs, the recruitment efficiency can be enhanced. LD from time to time organises large-scale job fairs with different themes, such as the Job Expo for Elderly and Rehabilitation Services held in July 2018 to assist non-governmental organisations operating elderly and rehabilitation services

in recruiting staff.

Importation of Carers

15. In accordance with the Government's established policy, employers must accord priority to fill available job vacancies with local workers. Employers with genuine difficulties in local recruitment may apply for importation of workers at technician level or below under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) administered by LD.

16. At present, private and self-financing RCHEs may apply for importation of carers under SLS. To further alleviate the manpower shortage in the elderly care service sector, SWD introduced measures in April 2014, allowing private RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to apply for importation of carers for their non-bought places. In 2017 and 2018, approval was given to employers of the elderly care service sector to import 1 510 and 1 409 carers respectively under SLS.

17. The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address announced that, on the premise of safeguarding local workers' priority for employment, consideration might be given to allowing greater flexibility for subsidised elderly (and also rehabilitation) service units to import carers. The Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address also mentioned that given the increasing need for additional subsidised elderly care services, the Government would review the practical circumstances and determine when and how to implement the importation of carers. In this regard, the Government will analyse the relevant data of the 2019 survey as soon as possible, and cautiously explore the way forward.

Conclusion

18. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Education Bureau
Social Welfare Department
Labour Department
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