

For information on
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Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Initiatives for Supporting Employment

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Government's initiatives for supporting employment.

Recent measures

2. The Government has always kept a close watch over the economic conditions in Hong Kong and their impact on the labour market. We adopt a multi-pronged strategy and strive to provide employment support which caters to the needs of the unemployed, particularly those job seekers with special employment difficulties.

Enhancing employment programmes

3. The Labour Department (LD) implements the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM), Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) and Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged, young people and persons with disabilities, and provide them with on-the-job training (OJT) through the provision of OJT allowance. To further strengthen the employability of the elderly, young people and persons with disabilities, LD launches measures to enhance the above employment programmes as set out in paragraphs 4 to 6 below.

Increasing on-the-job training allowance

4. In September 2018, LD increased the OJT allowance payable to employers for engaging eligible job seekers under the above three employment programmes as follows:

- (a) Employers engaging job seekers aged 60 or above who are unemployed or have left the workforce and providing them with OJT under EPEM are offered a monthly OJT allowance, the ceiling of which has been raised from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per employee with the allowance period lengthened from the original three to six months to become six to 12 months. EPEM covers both full-time and part-time jobs.
- (b) The maximum amount of monthly allowance payable to employers who engage young people and provide them with OJT has been increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000 for a period of six to 12 months. Furthermore, to meet the needs of some youth, the scope of YETP has been expanded to cover part-time OJT posts.
- (c) The amount of OJT allowance payable to employers who engage each person with disabilities with employment difficulties has been increased from \$35,000 to a total of \$51,000, and the maximum period within which allowance is payable has been extended from eight months to nine months.

Providing retention allowance

5. LD plans to launch a pilot scheme in 2020 to encourage the elderly aged 60 or above, young people and persons with disabilities to undergo and complete OJT under its employment programmes through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. These employees, to be engaged under EPEM, YETP and WOPS, will be offered a retention allowance of \$3,000 if they stay in the OJT posts for three months. Thereafter, the employee will receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 for each ensuing month when he/she stays in the same job until his/her completion of the six to 12-month OJT. If the relevant employee takes up a part-time OJT post, he/she will be entitled to half the amount payable to a full-time employee. Subject to the length of the OJT period, the maximum amount of retention allowance that a full-time employee may receive is \$12,000. The pilot measure will run for three years during which LD will consider its effectiveness in enhancing the retention of the relevant employees before deciding the way forward.

Enhancing YETP

6. In view of the worsening of youth employment, LD will, through enhancing YETP, assist young people in entering the labour market. These enhancement measures include:

- (a) increasing the quota under “Career Kick-start”¹ (from 100 to 200 quota for each phase) as well as increasing the subsidy payable to participating non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (from \$8,300/month to \$9,000/month per trainee) starting from the new phase in December 2019 so as to provide young people with special employment difficulties more opportunities to undergo 12-month OJT in NGOs and receive support;
- (b) raising the workplace attachment allowance payable to trainees (from existing \$4,500 to \$5,800) with effect from January 2020; and
- (c) proactively canvassing OJT vacancies and collaborating with employers in organising thematic job fairs.

Launching a pilot programme to provide employment services for ethnic minority job seekers

7. To strengthen the employment support for ethnic minority (EM) job seekers, LD will launch a pilot programme in 2020 in conjunction with NGOs to provide one-stop employment services for EM job seekers through a case management approach so as to utilise NGOs’ community network, expertise in case management and experiences in serving EMs. In addition to canvassing vacancies suitable for EMs and providing support in their job search, the NGOs will provide post-placement follow-up services for EMs and their employers.

Strengthening retraining services and continuing education to facilitate employment

8. Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has been striving to provide placement-tied training courses and support services for the unemployed and eligible serving employees, with a view to upgrading their employment-related

¹ “Career Kick-start” aims at enhancing the employability of young people with employment difficulties through OJT in non-governmental organisations for 12 months.

skills. It currently provides around 700 training courses straddling 28 industry categories and various generic skills training, and provides 140 000 regular training places every year. ERB also provides different social groups with training courses and support services which cater for their needs, including assistance to mature persons aged 50 or above to rejoin the employment market; and enhanced training support to facilitate the employment of EMs.

9. Moreover, entrusted by the Government, ERB has launched the one-off “Love Upgrading Special Scheme” (“Special Scheme”) in October 2019. Employees affected by the recent economic downturn may enrol to upgrade their skills and pursue self-enhancement, with a view to rejoining the employment market as soon as possible. The Special Scheme imposes no restriction on the trade or education attainment of learners. It provides comprehensive training which lasts for two to three months, covering “Vocational Skills” of 19 trades, as well as “Innovation and Technology” and “Generic Skills”. A training allowance would be provided to trainees during the training period. Trainees who have completed “Vocational Skills” courses would receive follow-up placement services. Trainees shall attend the courses by end June 2020. It is planned that 10 000 affected employees could take part in the Special Scheme. A total of 4 144 trainees’ enrolment applications were received over the first two months since the Special Scheme was launched (as at end November 2019). In view of the positive response to the Special Scheme, after discussing with the Government, ERB will enhance and extend the Scheme, including to consider increasing the maximum amount of monthly allowance per trainee from \$4,000 to \$5,800 through legislative amendment, expanding the choices of trades and courses, in particular the provision of part-time arrangement for the popular “Vocational Skills” courses, and offering more training places based on demand.

10. Continuing Education Fund (CEF) encourages local workforce to pursue continuing education by providing them with subsidies for continuing education and training. A series of CEF enhancement measures have been implemented since 1 April 2019, including doubling the 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. Anyone who once opened a CEF account is eligible for the enhancement measures. The Government will soon further expand the scope of CEF courses to cover eligible online courses provided by local course providers, with a view to providing the public with more diversified channels of

continuing learning. The enhancement measures of CEF benefit persons of different age groups by greatly increasing their choices and flexibility of continuing learning, with a view to further equipping themselves and enhancing their work capabilities and potentials.

Other initiatives

Providing comprehensive and free employment services

11. LD provides comprehensive and free employment and recruitment services to job seekers and employers through its 13 job centres, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industries, Telephone Employment Service Centre and Job Vacancy Processing Centre. LD's Interactive Employment Service (iES) website (www.jobs.gov.hk) provides job vacancy and employment information to job seekers while employers can submit and post job vacancy information through the website. Various dedicated webpages have also been set up on the iES website to cater for the needs of different job seekers (such as the elderly and EMs) and employers. Concurrently, job seekers can make use of the iES mobile application running on smart phones or mobile devices to search for suitable job vacancies and receive push notifications on newly posted vacancies which match their pre-set criteria as well as job fairs organised by LD. LD will continue to enhance the functionality and design of the iES website and its mobile application to provide job seekers and employers with more convenient online employment services and better user experience.

12. From January to November 2019, 40 669 job seekers registered with LD for the employment services², representing a 11.3% increase as compared to the same period last year. LD also recorded 1 206 803 private sector vacancies which represented a 11.5% drop as compared to the historic high figure of 1 363 400 during the same period in 2018. Nonetheless, employers' demand for LD's recruitment service is still forthcoming. LD will continue to enhance its efficiency in handling and disseminating job vacancy information and step up its efforts in canvassing job vacancies with a view to facilitating the

² Currently, the vast majority of employers using LD's recruitment services readily accept direct applications from job seekers. Job seekers can easily obtain the relevant job vacancy information and employers' contact means through LD's Interactive Employment Service website, its mobile application and vacancy search terminals. In applying for these vacancies, job seekers need not register with LD.

dissemination of job vacancy information.

13. LD collaborates with employers from various sectors in organising job fairs of different themes regularly to offer a speedy and convenient job search and recruitment channel for job seekers and employers. As the elderly and rehabilitation care sector continues to have keen manpower needs, LD will organise a series of district-based and large-scale job fairs for the sector and set up in iES a dedicated webpage to feature the relevant job vacancies so as to facilitate job seekers to apply for the posts and employers of the sector to fill the vacancies.

Services for elderly job seekers

14. In addition to EPEM as mentioned in paragraphs 3 to 5 above, LD also implements various measures to support employment of the elderly, 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 job centres, establishing a dedicated webpage for them on iES website, etc. to facilitate their access to updated employment information and search for suitable job vacancies. Moreover, to promote the friendly working environment for the elderly, LD will continue to, through various promotional activities, raise public awareness of the potential labour force of elderly workers and encourage employers to adopt friendly employment practices for the elderly.

Services for job seekers with disabilities

15. To strengthen the employment support for job seekers with disabilities having employment difficulties, LD launched a two-year Pilot Scheme on Counselling Service for job seekers with disabilities in September 2016, engaging a non-governmental welfare organisation to help job seekers in need of emotional counselling service. In view of the positive response, upon the completion of the two-year pilot, the counselling service has been regularised and named “Counselling Scheme for People with Disabilities” with effect from September 2018. LD continues to offer professional psychological and emotional counselling to needy job seekers with disabilities registered with the Selective Placement Division. The counselling service is provided by registered social workers of NGO which has expertise and experience in this respect. It serves to alleviate the emotional problems of job seekers with

disabilities arising from the state of their disabilities or personal or family matters, so as to help them concentrate on job search and settle in their new jobs, thereby realising their potentials in employment. The Scheme served 53 job seekers with disabilities, offering a total of 222.5 hours of emotional counselling services in the year after it has been regularised.

Employment in One-stop

16. The Employment in One-stop (EOS) was set up by LD in Tin Shui Wai in 2011 as a pioneer one-stop employment and training centre to take forward one of the recommendations of the former Commission on Poverty, i.e. to streamline, integrate and enhance employment and training/retraining services provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), LD and ERB, with a view to providing more targeted assistance for job seekers with employment difficulties. The target clients of the EOS model are predominantly unemployed able-bodied Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients in the Tin Shui Wai North district referred by SWD.

17. Drawing reference to the experience gained by EOS over the years in serving able-bodied CSSA recipients in the Tin Shui Wai North, the Government has strengthened collaborations among SWD, LD, ERB and NGOs operating SWD's Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance (IEAPS) (operating agencies) so that the employment and training/retraining services provided by the relevant organisations for able-bodied CSSA recipients become more streamlined and integrated. These enhanced collaboration measures include installing ERB's Training Net and LD's vacancy search terminals at service centres of operating agencies and establishing a mechanism to arrange ERB's Training Consultancy Service for the operating agencies. As EOS has completed its trial on the pioneer services to able-bodied CSSA recipients in the Tin Shui Wai North, and the relevant collaboration mode has been extended to IEAPS, those able-bodied CSSA recipients now being served by EOS will be returned to the NGOs in the district with effect from 1 April 2020 to continue to receive employment support services. EOS will be renamed the Yuen Long Job Centre and continue to serve job seekers in general in the district.

Conclusion

18. The Government will continue to monitor its provision of employment services and training support in the light of the local economic and labour market conditions. Corresponding adjustments or enhancements will be initiated in a timely manner so as to better serve the changing needs of both job seekers and employers.

19. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and give their advice.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Labour Department
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