

For information on
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Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Latest Development in the Employment Services of the Labour Department

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest development in the employment services of the Labour Department (LD).

New measures

2. LD has always kept a close watch over the economic conditions in Hong Kong and their impact on the employment 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, and launch enhancement measures timely.

Enhancing employment programmes

3. 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. In light of the deteriorating employment situation, LD will launch enhancement measures to further strengthen their employability. Upon implementation of the enhancement measures, the maximum amount of allowance payable to employers engaging job seekers under these three employment programmes will be \$60,000 per employee, while the maximum amount of retention allowance that an eligible employee may receive, depending on the length and mode of OJT, is \$12,000.

Increasing OJT allowance

4. LD will raise the ceiling of OJT allowance payable to employers under the above three employment programmes in the second half of 2020, with a view to further encouraging employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged, young people and persons with disabilities. Details are as follows:

- (a) The maximum amount of OJT allowance payable to employers engaging job seekers aged 60 or above who are unemployed or have left the workforce and providing them with OJT under EPEM will be increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month per employee for a period of six to 12 months.
- (b) In view of the rapid deterioration of the employment situation of the middle-aged in recent months, the maximum amount of OJT allowance payable to employers engaging unemployed job seekers aged 40 to 59 under EPEM will also be increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month per employee for a period of three to six months.
- (c) The maximum amount of OJT allowance payable to employers under YETP will be increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month for a period of six to 12 months.
- (d) The maximum amount of OJT allowance granted to employers under WOPS will also be raised. The ceiling of the allowance will be increased from \$7,000 to \$8,000 per month during the three-month work adaptation period and from \$5,000 to \$6,000 per month for the following six months.

Providing retention allowance

5. LD plans to launch a pilot scheme in the second half of 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 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 and LD will gauge its effectiveness in enhancing the retention of the relevant employees before deciding the way forward.

Launching a pilot programme for ethnic minority (EM) job seekers

6. To strengthen the employment support for EM job seekers, LD will launch a pilot programme in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (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. LD is conducting a tendering exercise for the pilot programme which is expected to be launched in the second half of 2020.

Other initiatives

Providing comprehensive and free employment and recruitment services

General employment and recruitment services

7. 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. In 2019 and from January to April 2020, 43 742 and 10 195 job seekers respectively registered with LD for the above employment services¹. At the same time, LD respectively recorded 1 288 926 and 188 483 private sector vacancies. LD will step up its efforts in liaising with employers of various

¹ 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.

industries to canvass job vacancies for job seekers with different educational attainments and work experience.

8. 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 publicise 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. As the elderly and rehabilitation care sector continues to have keen manpower needs, LD has set up on iES a dedicated webpage to feature the relevant job vacancies. 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. The iES website is one of the most popular government websites. In 2019 and from January to April 2020, the iES website respectively recorded about 163 million and 50 million page views, or an average of around 0.45 million and 0.41 million per day, whereas its mobile application registered about 135 million and 40 million hits in the same periods respectively. 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.

9. Following the implementation of special work arrangement for government departments as announced by the Government during the COVID-19 epidemic, most services that entailed face-to-face contact had to be suspended. Nonetheless, LD's Job Vacancy Processing Centre continued to receive and vet job vacancies during the special work arrangement and disseminate the vacancy information to job seekers through the iES website and mobile application to facilitate their job search. The Telephone Employment Service Centre and telephone hotlines of all job/recruitment centres also continued to operate during this period to provide job seekers with employment advisory and job referral services by phone.

Job fairs

10. To enhance efficiency of recruitment and facilitate placement of job seekers in the vicinity of their residences, job centres located across the territory worked closely with employers in their corresponding districts to organise 960

district-based job fairs in 2019, arranging 32 098 on-the-spot interviews for job seekers. During the year, the three industry-based recruitment centres organised a total of 653 job fairs, arranging 20 915 on-the-spot interviews for job seekers. Moreover, LD organised 18 large-scale job fairs in 2019, offering 35 614 job vacancies and attracting 25 407 job seekers to the events. These large-scale job fairs included, among others, two inclusive job fairs that were suitable for EM job seekers, five job fairs targeted at middle-aged and elderly job seekers and three job fairs suitable for job seekers with tertiary education.

11. To reduce the risk of viral infection posed by the congregation of people during the COVID-19 epidemic, LD had to cancel most job fairs scheduled for February to April 2020. With the stabilisation of the epidemic, LD has gradually resumed the organisation of smaller-scale district-based job fairs and recruitment activities in industry-based recruitment centres since 4 May. LD will closely monitor the development of the epidemic and cooperate with employers from various sectors to resume timely the staging of large-scale job fairs of different themes.

Higher Education Employment Information e-Platform (HEEIP)

12. LD's HEEIP (www.hee.gov.hk) provides employment support for job seekers with higher education, including Hong Kong students who are educated in tertiary institutions outside Hong Kong, the second generation of Hong Kong emigrants who are interested in working in Hong Kong, as well as persons from overseas with higher academic/ professional qualifications. This e-platform seeks to enhance their understanding of the Hong Kong employment market and facilitate them to search and apply for suitable job openings. In 2019 and from January to April 2020, more than 24 000 and 5 100 job vacancies with an academic requirement of bachelor's degree or above were posted on HEEIP respectively. During the same periods, HEEIP recorded about two million and 0.84 million page views, or an average of around 5 400 and 6 900 per day respectively.

Support for job seekers with employment difficulties

13. In addition to the planned enhancement measures to EPEM, YETP and WOPS, as well as the pilot programme to be launched for EM job seekers mentioned above, LD also provides other dedicated employment services for job seekers with special needs to support their employment.

Employment support for elderly job seekers

14. LD 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 friendly working environment for the elderly, LD will continue to, through various promotional activities, raise public awareness of elderly workers as a potential labour force and encourage employers to adopt friendly employment practices for the elderly.

Employment support for young people

15. LD's YETP has all along been providing one-stop pre-employment and OJT for young school leavers aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below. In the 2019/20 programme year², YETP has launched a new phase of the employment project Career Kick-start which targets at young people with special needs, including those with low educational attainment, emotional or behavioural problems, learning difficulties or suffering from prolonged unemployment. Participating NGOs would receive subsidy from the Government in offering OJT of 12 months' duration to these trainees with a view to enhancing their employability. The subsidy under the new phase has been increased from \$8,300 to \$9,000 per month per trainee, so as to encourage the participation of NGOs to provide more opportunities for the trainees to be engaged by NGO to undergo OJT. It is expected that the participating trainees will commence their employment in the second quarter of 2020 in batches.

16. In addition, YETP has also raised the workplace attachment allowance payable to trainees from \$4,500 to \$5,800 with effect from January 2020, so as to further encourage young people in acquiring hands-on working experience through workplace attachment training, thereby better preparing themselves before entering the labour market.

² YETP operates on the basis of programme year, running from September each year to August of the following year.

Employment support for job seekers with disabilities

17. The Selective Placement Division (SPD) of LD provides personalised employment services for job seekers with disabilities fit for open employment. Employment consultants of SPD conduct in-depth interviews to learn about the qualifications, skills, experience, career preferences, etc. of individual job seekers with disabilities in order to provide them with employment counselling and help them understand their work capabilities and market demands. The employment consultants proactively conduct job matching and canvass suitable job vacancies for job seekers with disabilities and refer them to employers for job interviews. Upon placing job seekers with disabilities into employment, the employment consultants will provide follow-up service for at least six months to help them settle in their new jobs.

18. To strengthen the employment support for job seekers with disabilities having employment difficulties, LD has implemented the Counselling Service for job seekers with disabilities since September 2016, engaging a non-governmental welfare organisation to provide professional psychological and emotional counselling to needy job seekers with disabilities registered with SPD. The counselling service is provided by registered social workers of that organisation 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.

19. LD will also continue to promote the employment of persons with disabilities through publicity as well as actively liaise with employers from different sectors to enhance their understanding of the capabilities of persons with disabilities and encourage them to provide more suitable job vacancies for persons with disabilities.

Employment support for EM job seekers

20. LD's job centres have been providing dedicated services for EM job seekers through special counters, resource corners, employment briefings, etc. EM job seekers in need may also meet employment officers to obtain personalised employment advisory service. In 2019 and from January to April

2020, 1 231 and 313 EM job seekers respectively registered for LD's employment services¹. Among them, 880 and 219 were job seekers of South Asian origins respectively.

21. LD has also made arrangements with NGOs to provide interpretation services for EM job seekers who speak neither Chinese nor English. In 2019 and from January to April 2020, staff of job centres/ industry-based recruitment centres introduced interpretation services to 2 565 and 328 EM job seekers who turned up at the centres in person respectively, and in the light of their needs, arranged interpretation services on 10 and 2 occasions.

22. Meanwhile, LD continues to canvass and disseminate information on vacancies suitable for EMs. Key information of all job vacancies is translated and displayed in Chinese and English on the iES website, its mobile application and vacancy search terminals³ to facilitate EMs to browse vacancy information. In 2019, LD organised two large-scale inclusive job fairs and 12 district-based inclusive job fairs to enhance the employment opportunities of EMs.

23. LD has also engaged two employment assistants who are proficient in EM languages at Kowloon West Job Centre in Sham Shui Po and Yuen Long Job Centre in Tin Shui Wai to provide employment services for EM job seekers since May 2017. Apart from partnering with experienced employment officers in providing personalised employment services for EM job seekers, these employment assistants conversant with EM languages and cultures also help LD proactively reach out to those with employment needs and encourage them to make use of LD's employment services.

24. Moreover, LD will continue to implement the Employment Services Ambassador (ESA) Programme for EMs to engage trainees of YETP who can communicate in EM languages as ESAs in LD's job centres, industry-based recruitment centres and job fairs to undergo OJT. The programme not only can help LD serve EM job seekers more effectively but also enrich ESAs' own working experience and resume, benefiting their job search in the open market. To strengthen the training for the trainees, LD has extended the OJT period for those ESAs engaged since September 2018 from six months to one year. Launched in September 2014, the programme has so far engaged a total of 149 ESAs.

³ LD has installed vacancy search terminals in six Home Affairs Department-funded Support Services Centres/Sub-centres for EMs.

Concluding remarks

25. The COVID-19 epidemic has severely disrupted a wide range of economic activities. The labour market will continue to face significant pressure from the economic fallout arising from the epidemic in the near term. LD will continue to closely monitor the development and review the provision of its employment services. Corresponding adjustments or enhancements will be initiated in a timely manner so as to better serve the needs of both job seekers and employers.

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

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