

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 job seekers, particularly those with special employment difficulties, and launch enhancement measures timely.

Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme

3. To create job openings for the young people in Hong Kong and assist them to seize the opportunities for career development, the Government launched the Greater Bay Area (GBA) Youth Employment Scheme on 8 January 2021 to encourage enterprises with businesses in both Hong Kong and the Mainland cities of the GBA to employ university graduates from Hong Kong and station them to work in the Mainland cities of the GBA. The scheme provides 2 000 places, around 700 of which are designated for innovation and technology posts. Hong Kong residents who are legally employable in Hong Kong and hold bachelor's degrees or above awarded by institutions in or outside Hong Kong from 2019 to 2021 may participate in the scheme. Participating enterprises have to employ the target graduates in Hong Kong according to Hong Kong laws, offer them a monthly salary of not less than HK\$18,000, and station them in the Mainland cities of the GBA to work and receive on-the-job training. The Government will pay the enterprises a

monthly allowance of HK\$10,000 for each qualified graduate employed for up to 18 months.

Enhancing employment programmes

4. 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 enhanced the programmes in September 2020 by raising the ceiling of OJT allowance payable to employers and introducing retention allowance for eligible employees participating in the programmes.

Increasing OJT allowance

5. LD raised the ceiling of OJT allowance payable to employers under EPEM, YETP and WOPS in September 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 was increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month per employee for a period of six to 12 months. The maximum amount of OJT allowance for engaging unemployed job seekers aged 40 to 59 was also increased from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month per employee for a period of three to six months.
- (b) The maximum amount of OJT allowance payable to employers under YETP was increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month for a period of six to 12 months.
- (c) The maximum amount of OJT allowance granted to employers under WOPS was also raised. The ceiling of the allowance was 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

6. LD launched a pilot scheme in September 2020 to encourage the elderly aged 60 or above, young people and persons with disabilities who have participated in EPEM, YETP and WOPS to undergo and complete OJT through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. These employees will be offered a retention allowance of \$3,000 if they have stayed in full-time posts for three months. Thereafter, they will receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 for completion of each subsequent month until the end of the six to 12-month OJT. For part-time posts, the respective amounts payable will be halved. Subject to the length of the OJT period, the maximum amount of retention allowance a full-time employee may receive is \$12,000. The pilot scheme will run for three years and LD will gauge its effectiveness in enhancing the retention of the relevant employees before deciding the way forward.

Racial Diversity Employment Programme

7. To strengthen the employment support for ethnic minority (EM) job seekers, LD has commissioned two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to implement the Racial Diversity Employment Programme (RDEP) since November 2020. The Programme provides, on a pilot basis, one-stop employment services for EM job seekers in a case management approach through NGOs so as to utilise NGOs' community network, expertise in case management and experiences in serving EMs. The NGOs are responsible for canvassing vacancies suitable for EMs, providing support in their job search, and offering post-placement follow-up services for EMs and their employers.

Other initiatives

Providing comprehensive and free employment and recruitment services

General employment and recruitment services

8. 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 2020, 41 180 job seekers registered with LD for the above employment services¹. At the same time, LD recorded 686 297 private sector vacancies. LD will step up its efforts in liaising with employers of various industries to canvass job vacancies for job seekers with different educational attainments and work experience.

9. 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 the most popular government job board in Hong Kong. In 2020, the iES website recorded about 164 million page views, or an average of around 0.45 million per day, whereas its mobile application registered about 136 million hits in the same periods. 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.

10. Following the implementation of special work arrangements 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 arrangements 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.

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.

Job fairs

11. To enhance efficiency of recruitment and expedite the dissemination of employment information, LD liaises with employers in various industries to organise large-scale job fairs in different locations as well as industry-based and district-based job fairs at its recruitment centres and job centres respectively. To reduce the risk of viral infection posed by the congregation of people during the COVID-19 epidemic, LD cancelled many of its physical job fairs scheduled for 2020. Nevertheless, in order to assist job seekers in seeking jobs, LD introduced online job fairs and strived to resume the organisation of smaller-scale district-based recruitment activities in job centres and recruitment centres when each wave of epidemic became stabilised.

12. In 2020, the job centres organised 586 district-based job fairs and arranged 22 905 on-the-spot interviews for job seekers, and the three industry-based recruitment centres also organised 354 job fairs and arranged 10 681 on-the-spot interviews for job seekers. During the year, LD organised three large-scale job fairs, offering 7 389 job vacancies and attracting 4 250 job seekers to the events. LD also organised two virtual job fairs, offering over 1 700 vacancies. LD will closely monitor the development of the pandemic and cooperate with employers from various sectors to resume the staging of large-scale job fairs when the situation permits and organise more thematic job fairs to help job seekers secure employment.

Higher Education Employment Information e-Platform

13. LD's Higher Education Employment Information e-Platform (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 2020, more than 20 000 job vacancies with an academic requirement of bachelor's degree or above were posted on HEEIP. During the same period, HEEIP recorded about 2.3 million page views, or an average of around 6 400 per day.

14. To achieve synergy, LD plans to integrate HEEIP into the iES website to serve job seekers with higher education both within and outside Hong Kong in the third quarter of 2021. This enhancement measure makes use of the popularity of the iES website to attract more people to view relevant information, and reduce manpower and expenditure in running this e-platform independently.

Support for job seekers with employment difficulties

15. In addition to GBA Youth Employment Scheme, the enhancement measures to EPDM, YETP and WOPS, as well as RDEP 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

16. 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 conduct various promotional activities to 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

17. 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 2020/21 programme year², YETP continues to launch the employment project Career Kick-start which targets 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

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

Government in offering OJT of 12 months' duration to these trainees with a view to enhancing their employability.

Employment support for job seekers with disabilities

18. 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.

19. 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 potential in employment.

20. 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

21. 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 2020, 1 504 EM job seekers registered for LD's employment services.

22. LD has also made arrangements with NGOs to provide interpretation services for EM job seekers who speak neither Chinese nor English. In 2020, staff of job centres/ industry-based recruitment centres introduced interpretation services to 1 912 EM job seekers who turned up the centres in person, and in the light of their needs, arranged interpretation services on 9 occasions.

23. 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 2020, LD organised 10 district-based inclusive job fairs to enhance the employment opportunities of EMs.

24. LD has also engaged two employment assistants who are proficient in EM languages at Kowloon West Job Centre and Yuen Long Job Centre 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.

25. 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 169 ESAs.

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

Concluding remarks

26. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted a wide range of economic activities. The labour market will continue to face significant pressure arising from the pandemic 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.

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

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