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Panel on Manpower

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 18 February 2021**

Employment support 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 support services provided by the Labour Department ("LD") since the Fifth 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 and recruitment services provided by LD

4. Members noted with concern about the decline in the number of LD's registered job seekers as well as the decrease in the job referrals and direct placements through LD's referral services. In view of the economic downturn and the worsening labour market conditions, members were concerned about whether LD's employment services and job referral services could provide adequate support in job search, employment matching and employment training to the unemployed.

5. The Administration explained that job seekers might be placed into employment either through LD's referral service or by direct application to employers who advertised vacancies via LD. Members were also advised that while there was a drop in the number of job vacancies in LD due to the global recession and the COVID-19 epidemic, LD would 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.

Employment support for mature persons

6. Members noted with concern that there were only 1 463 successful placements under the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("EPM") in 2017 and some 40% of the participants left employment after an employment period of six months. The participation rate of elderly job seekers aged 60 or above in EPM was also very low. Noting that EPM was renamed as the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged ("EPEM") from 1 September 2018, members asked whether it was due to the unsatisfactory response of EPM and whether the Administration had reviewed the effectiveness of EPM/EPEM in enhancing the employability of elderly persons.

7. According to the Administration, in order to further encourage employers to hire job seekers aged 60 or above and provide them with on-the-job training, LD enhanced EPM and renamed it as EPEM on 1 September 2018, covering both full-time and part-time jobs. Employers engaging job seekers aged 60 or above who were unemployed or had left the workforce were offered a monthly on-the-job training allowance up to \$5,000 per employee for a period of six to 12 months. As for those aged 40 to 59, the maximum amount of allowance remained at \$4,000 per month for a period of three to six months. As regards the effectiveness of EPEM, the Administration advised that from September 2018 to August 2019, placements recorded within the ambit of EPEM and cases involving job seekers aged 60 or above had an increase of over 25% and over

106% respectively when compared with the corresponding period in the previous years. The Administration added that LD had also implemented the Work Trial Scheme to enhance the employability of job seekers who had difficulties in finding jobs. The participating organizations were encouraged to engage the participants after the completion of the one-month work trial. For cases eligible for joining EPEM, employers might also apply for on-the-job training allowance.

8. Members were advised that an additional funding of \$30 million was provided to enhance the employment programmes implemented by LD in the 2020-2021 Budget. To stabilize employment under EPEM, LD would launch a three-year pilot scheme in 2020 to encourage the elderly aged 60 or above to stay in the on-the-job training posts through the provision of a retention allowance. Similar arrangements would also be made for young people and persons with disabilities to undergo and complete on-the-job training under LD's employment programmes. There was a view that the Administration should streamline the application procedures and disburse the retention allowance to eligible participants as early as possible.

9. Some members pointed out that 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. The Administration should adopt measures to encourage employers to provide flexible work arrangements and part-time jobs for mature job seekers. There was also a view that the Administration should collate statistics on the employment situation of women, so as to facilitate the formulation of specific policy and measures to enhance the employability of women, especially those middle-aged who had previously quitted their jobs due to family reasons and intended to re-join the workforce.

10. The Administration advised that 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 for elderly job seekers on its iES website to facilitate their access to updated information and search for suitable full-time or part-time job vacancies. 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

11. According to the Administration, 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.

12. Some members expressed concern that more than 50% of YETP's pre-employment training courses were cancelled in the programme years from 2015 to 2018 due to insufficient enrolment and less than 50% of YETP trainees enrolled in on-the-job training from 2013 to 2018. Noting with concern about the unemployment situation of the young people, some members considered that the Administration should relax the age limit of the target service group of YETP to cover young people aged 15 to 29 with education attainment at degree level or below.

13. 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 proportion of the target group of young people joining YETP was maintained at around 30% in recent years. The lower participation rate of YETP in recent years was partly attributed to the decrease in population of the target age group of 15 to 24 and the increasing opportunities for these young people to pursue further studies. That said, as young people with less working experience and low education attainment would encounter greater difficulties in job seeking, the Administration considered it appropriate to maintain the existing age and education attainment limits under YETP. To strengthen the employment support to young people, LD introduced enhancement measures under YETP, such as increasing the maximum amount of monthly allowance payable to employers who engaged young people and provided them with on-the-job training from \$4,000 to \$5,000 for a period of six to 12 months; expanding the scope of YETP to cover part-time on-the-job training; increasing the quota under "Career Kick-start" to assist young people in entering the labour market; and raising the workplace attachment allowance payable to trainees from \$4,500 to \$5,800. In addition, LD would provide retention allowance on a pilot basis for three years to encourage young people to undergo and complete on-the-job training.

14. The Administration also advised that the unemployment rate of young people was often higher than the overall unemployment rate. LD had been implementing a series of measures and programmes to enhance the

employability of young people and promote their employment. For example, two Youth Employment Resource Centres named Youth Employment Start provided personalized advisory and support services on employment and self-employment to those aged 15 to 29 to enhance their employability and better plan their career paths.

Employment support for persons with disabilities

15. 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 raised concern about the Administration's efforts in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities and whether it would consider setting a mandatory employment quota for employees with disabilities in the Government and public organizations, and requiring large enterprises to employ a specified percentage or a specific number of employees with disabilities.

16. The Administration advised that it had all along been committed to promoting the employment of persons with disabilities through various publicity channels. While there was no mandatory requirement under the prevailing policy regarding the employment of employees with disabilities, the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") had issued guidelines for individual bureaux/government departments to accord an appropriate degree of preference in recruiting persons with disabilities found suitable for a job. 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 CSB and would disseminate such information to both able-bodied job seekers and those with disabilities.

17. 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. This counselling service was regularized and named "Counselling Scheme for People with Disabilities" with effect from 1 September 2018.

18. Members also noted that LD implemented the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme ("WOPS") which encouraged employers to engage job seekers with disabilities and provided them with coaching and support through the provision of an allowance. Members, however, 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. There was also a call for the Administration to conduct a comprehensive review on the effectiveness of WOPS.

19. 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 further encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities who had employment difficulties and assist them in settling in new posts, WOPS had been enhanced since 1 September 2018 with the work adaptation period extended from two months to three months. The ceiling of monthly allowance has also been raised from \$5,500 to \$7,000 during the three-month work adaptation period and from \$4,000 to \$5,000 for the ensuing six months. A retention allowance would also be provided to encourage persons with disabilities to undergo and complete on-the-job training under a pilot scheme to be launched in 2020.

Employment assistance to ethnic minorities

20. Members expressed concern about the high unemployment rate of the ethnic minorities ("EMs") job seekers and called on the Administration to draw up the specific measures to address the employment difficulties of EM job seekers, such as language barrier and cultural difference.

21. According to the Administration, LD's job centres had been maintaining close contact with non-governmental organizations ("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. In addition, LD would launch a pilot programme in the second half of 2020 in conjunction with

NGOs to provide employment services for EM job seekers through a case management approach so as to leverage NGOs' community network, expertise in case management and experiences in serving EMs. The commissioned NGOs would provide pre-employment counselling, job matching services and post-placement follow-up services for EMs and their employers. Members were concerned about the assessment criteria in selecting NGOs under the tendering exercise and the target number of beneficiaries of the pilot programme for EM job seekers. The Administration advised that apart from the views of NGOs on the pilot programme, LD would consider, among others, the experience of NGOs in serving EMs when conducting the tender assessment.

22. Members were also advised that 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. Moreover, 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. Furthermore, 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 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.

23. 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.

Latest developments

24. According to the Administration, LD raised the ceiling of on-the-job ("OJT") allowance payable to eligible employers engaging job seekers under

EPEM, YETP and WOPS to \$60,000 per employee in September 2020. The pilot scheme which provided a retention allowance to eligible elderly person, young people and persons with disabilities engaged under EPPEM, YETP and WOPS was also launched in September 2020. Subject to the length of OJT period, the maximum amount of retention allowance that a full-time employee might receive was \$12,000. In November 2020, LD rolled out the Racial Diversity Employment Programme, on a pilot basis, to provide one-stop employment support services for EM job seekers in a case management approach through NGOs.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 February 2021

**Relevant papers on the employment support services of
the Labour Department**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	25.1.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	18.6.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower and Panel on Welfare Services (Joint meeting)	9.12.2013 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.12.2013 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	18.2.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	17.7.2014 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	16.12.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	20.1.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	17.11.2015 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	16.2.2016 (Items III and IV)	Agenda Minutes
	15.3.2016 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	15.11.2016 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	16.1.2018 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	16.10.2018 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	19.2.2019 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)1917/18-19(01)
	8.11.2019 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
	17.12.2019 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	19.5.2020 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes

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