

Index Page

Replies to supplementary questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-15

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Session No. : 17

File Name : LWB(L)-2S-e1.doc

| Reply Serial No. | Question Serial No. | Name of Member | Head | Programme |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--|
| S-LWB(L)01 | S0173 | TANG Ka-piu | 90 | (2) Employment Services (3) Safety and Health at Work (4) Employees' Rights and Benefits |
| S-LWB(L)02 | S0174 | TANG Ka-piu | 90 | (2) Employment Services (3) Safety and Health at Work (4) Employees' Rights and Benefits |
| S-LWB(L)03 | S0175 | TANG Ka-piu | 90 | (2) Employment Services |
| S-LWB(L)04 | S0158 | WONG Kwok-hing | 90 | (1) Labour Relations |
| S-LWB(L)05 | S0161 | WONG Kwok-kin | 90 | (4) Employees' Rights and Benefits |
| S-LWB(L)06 | S0157 | CHAN Yuen-han | 141 | (7) Subvention: Vocational Training Council (Vocational Training) |

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-LWB(L)01

(Question Serial No. S0173)

Head: (90) Labour Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (2) Employment Services (3) Safety and Health at Work
(4) Employees' Rights and Benefits

Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Labour (Mr. Donald TONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

According to reply no. LWB(L)101, the weekly working hours in elderly homes in the past three years were as high as 54 hours, whilst the median monthly wages in 2011 and 2012 were less than \$10,000 (the figure for 2013 is not yet available). With the small pay rise and prolonged working hours, some elderly homes are facing recruitment difficulties and manpower wastage. In this connection, does the Administration have any plan to assist elderly homes in improving the working conditions and remuneration packages of the care workers to increase the incentives for local employees to join the industry?

Asked by: Hon. TANG Ka-piu

Reply:

The Administration understands the strong manpower demand of the residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs). From 2014-15 onwards, the Administration will increase the annual recurrent funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance the Lump Sum Grant System to, among others, enable NGOs to recruit and retain their staff more effectively. In addition, the Administration will raise the unit subsidy of all the bought places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme and the Nursing Home Place Purchase Scheme, with a view to enhancing the capacity of these RCHEs to recruit and retain manpower in order to strengthen the care and support for the elderly residents concerned.

To provide the younger generation with more employment options and long-term development in their career paths, as well as to cope with the pressing demand for care personnel in the social welfare sector, the Administration launched the "first-hire-then-train" pilot scheme for the elderly services in 2013. In the light of the positive response to this pilot scheme, the Administration has planned to expand and extend it to cover also rehabilitation services, providing an additional 1 000 places for young people who have graduated from Secondary 5 or Secondary 6 level. The total expenditure involved is approximately \$147 million.

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**S-LWB(L)02****(Question Serial No. S0174)**

Head: (90) Labour Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (2) Employment Services (3) Safety and Health at Work
(4) Employees' Rights and Benefits

Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Labour (Mr. Donald TONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

According to reply no. LWB(L)100, the average number of job vacancies in the construction industry in each of the past three years was less than 1 000, whilst there were thousands of underemployed persons and tens of thousands of unemployed persons. For example, in the fourth quarter of 2013, the number of underemployed persons was 24 300 and the number of unemployed persons was 13 500 in the construction industry. The underemployment rate and the unemployment rate were 7.4% and 4.1% respectively, much higher than the overall underemployment rate (1.3%) and unemployment rate (3.1%) over the same period in Hong Kong. The figures indicate that the construction industry is not in acute shortage of labour as claimed by businesses. Has the Administration reviewed on how to better utilise and train the existing manpower to meet the manpower demand arising from the future infrastructure projects instead of relying on labour importation?

Asked by: Hon. TANG Ka-piu

Reply:

With the onset of major infrastructure projects and other construction works in the coming years, the construction output will be maintained at a high level. The construction industry is facing increasing manpower demand. This is compounded by the acute ageing and skills mismatch problems. According to the Construction Industry Council (CIC), more than 40% of the registered construction workers are aged 50 or above. Further, there is skills mismatch problem as an increasing proportion of projects would be in infrastructure development in the coming few years but the dominating work type in the construction sector used to be building works. CIC advised that only 35% of registered construction workers are registered skilled/semi-skilled workers.

To address the manpower demand of the industry, the Government has deployed a series of measures to support CIC to strengthen its role in training of local construction personnel including training of semi-skilled workers and enhancing promotion and publicity activities to attract more people to join the industry. CIC has also implemented measures to enhance job matching including organising job fairs with contractors and launching a free online employment platform "JobsNet" to enhance job opportunities for unemployed and underemployed construction workers. Besides, CIC is exploring measures to attract the registered workers that have left the construction industry to re-join the industry to better utilise the potential workforce.

The Development Bureau has provided subsidies for fees of trade tests, specified training courses and skills enhancement courses to encourage and assist the in-service construction workers to be registered as skilled workers, and has provided subsidy to the senior construction workers to assist them to advance to the frontline supervisor/management levels.

Construction projects comprise works of different phases. Manpower shortage for individual trades

upstream will lead to delay of construction works and affect the employment of local workers in downstream of the construction process. Though the unemployment and underemployment rates of the construction industry are higher than the corresponding overall rates of Hong Kong, the former are at a relatively low level, reflecting the tight manpower situation of the industry.

Taking into account various factors including the limitations of training and better utilisation of potential workforce of local workers, the Development Bureau projects that from end-2013 to 2017 (coming four years), there will be labour shortage in the industry. With due regard to the principle of not affecting the employment and reasonable income levels of local construction workers, contractors of public works who face serious manpower shortage will submit applications for importing construction workers in the 26 designated jobs under the revised procedure of the Supplementary Labour Scheme. This will not only help meet the manpower demand of the construction works, but also help relieve the pressure on the local in-service skilled workers so that there is room for the semi-skilled workers to enhance their skills to achieve the productivity of skilled workers through in-service training.

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-LWB(L)03

(Question Serial No. S0175)

Head: (90) Labour Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (2) Employment Services
Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Labour (Mr. Donald TONG)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

Pursuant to reply no. LWB(L)097, would the Administration provide further information on the following:

- (a) From 2010 to 2013, more than half of the complaints involving imported workers received by the Labour Department (LD) each year were related to care workers (elderly service). Has the Administration studied the reasons for this?
- (b) Were there any imported workers, who had returned to their places of origin on completion of their employment contracts, subsequently approved under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) to come to Hong Kong again as an imported worker and took up the same job? If yes, what are the details as well as the number of workers and job titles involved?

Asked by: Hon. TANG Ka-piu

Reply:

The information sought is provided as follows:

- (a) From 2010 to 2013, care workers (elderly service) made up the largest proportion (from 35% to 54%) of imported workers approved annually under SLS. This may explain the higher incidence of complaints involving this group of imported workers.
- (b) LD and the Immigration Department do not have the statistics requested.

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-LWB(L)04

(Question Serial No. S0158)

Head: (90) Labour Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (1) Labour Relations
Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Labour (Mr. Donald TONG)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

According to reply no. LWB(L)110, the Administration stated that up to 30 September 2013, a total of 4 175 eligible government employees were approved to take paternity leave. To which departments did they belong? Did any of them take annual leave or other forms of compensatory leave immediately after paternity leave to extend the number of leave days during the period? What is the estimated time for paid paternity leave to be implemented across-the-board in Hong Kong?

Asked by: Hon. WONG Kwok-hing

Reply:

The 4 175 government employees were from 66 Bureaux/Departments. Amongst these paternity leave takers, about 60% were from six Disciplined Services Departments, namely the Hong Kong Police Force, Fire Services Department, Immigration Department, Customs and Excise Department, Correctional Services Department and Government Flying Service. The Administration does not have information on whether the paternity leave takers have taken other types of leave immediately following the paternity leave.

The Employment (Amendment) Bill 2014, which seeks to make three days' paid paternity leave a statutory benefit for working fathers, was introduced into the Legislative Council (LegCo) on 26 March 2014 and is currently under the scrutiny of LegCo. We hope LegCo can pass the Bill the soonest possible so that this family-friendly employment practice could be implemented early.

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-LWB(L)05

(Question Serial No. S0161)

Head: (90) Labour Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (4) Employees' Rights and Benefits
Controlling Officer: Commissioner for Labour (Mr. Donald TONG)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

According to reply no. LWB(L)113, the number of complaints against illegal employment in the catering industry reached 90 in 2013, an increase of 35 cases when compared to 2012. What were the reasons for the upsurge in the number of cases? Has the Labour Department (LD) taken any follow-up actions on each case, including approaching the Immigration Department (ImmD) and the Police to find out the development and prosecution status of those complaints?

Asked by: Hon. WONG Kwok-kin

Reply:

The catering industry is labour-intensive and requires a large pool of unskilled labour. It could be more prone to illegal employment activities when the demand of unskilled labour was acute in 2013. Besides, the LD launched publicity campaigns to enhance public awareness of the serious consequences of employing illegal workers and encouraged the public to report suspected illegal employment activities through its complaint hotline. These factors might contribute to the increase in the number of complaints against illegal employment activities in the catering industry.

LD followed up promptly all the complaints against illegal employment activities. LD will continue to conduct intelligence-based inspections and mount targeted operations with ImmD and the Police to combat illegal employment. Detected cases of illegal employment are referred to ImmD or the Police for further investigation and/or prosecution as appropriate. As the investigation and/or prosecution work is/are undertaken by other enforcement departments, LD does not have information and statistics on the development and prosecution status of individual complaints.

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-LWB(L)06

(Question Serial No. S0157)

Head: (141) Government Secretariat: Labour and Welfare Bureau

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (7) Subvention: Vocational Training Council (Vocational Training)

Controlling Officer: Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Miss Annie Tam)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Question:

Subsequent to Reply Serial No. LWB(L)116, would the Administration provide further information:

- (a) The enrolment rates under the pilot traineeship scheme (the Scheme) for the service industries in 2012-13 and 2013-14 (up to February 2014) are rather low as only 41% and 21% for the beauty care industry and 32% and 23% for the hairdressing industry were recorded respectively. What are the reasons for the low enrolment rates? What were the publicity efforts and the expenditure spent by the Administration over the past two years?
- (b) The Vocational Training Council plans to commence the training for the retail and elderly care services industries in June 2014. What are the numbers of training places and participants expected?
- (c) Has the Administration initiated new measures to step up publicity for the Scheme and attract more young people to enrol in the programmes?
- (d) When will a comprehensive review be conducted for the Scheme?

Asked by: Hon. CHAN Yuen-han

Reply:

- (a) The Vocational Training Council (VTC) organised various promotional activities in 2012-13 and 2013-14 on the Scheme. These included sending information leaflets to potential employers, secondary schools and non-governmental organisations; conducting introductory seminars for key players of the industry, school career masters, social workers and the general public; inviting potential trainees and their parents to visit the beauty care and hairdressing workshops in the VTC training centres for better understanding of the training environment and facilities; placing advertisements and topical write-ups on newspapers; and conducting roadshow in shopping malls in different districts. The total costs of these promotional activities amounted to \$0.68 million. VTC will continue and step up its efforts in promoting the Scheme in the coming years.
- (b) VTC has planned 180 training places for each of the industries (retail and elderly care services) in 2014-15.
- (c) In addition to the promotional activities outlined in part (a), VTC will, in conjunction with the Labour Department, organise job fairs and recruitment activities at shopping malls and various centres of Youth Employment and Training Programme located in different districts; adopt an out-reach approach to visit the target groups such as the new arrivals, single parents and ethnic minorities; and conduct online promotion, including website, Facebook and other social media, to advertise the Scheme.
- (d) VTC will continue to monitor the implementation of the Scheme and its effectiveness.