

Employment Support Scheme publishes fifth batch of employers receiving wage subsidies and commences disbursement of subsidies to sixth batch of applicants

The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) Secretariat published on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) today (July 21) the name list of the fifth batch of employers that have received wage subsidies, the amount of subsidies received and the employers' committed headcount of paid employees.

A Government spokesman said, "The name list of the fifth batch of employers published today covers about 9 000 employers. These employers have received wage subsidies totalling about \$4.1 billion (for June to August 2020), and committed to maintain a total paid headcount of about 186 000. Together with the published name lists of the first four batches of employers, the Secretariat published from June 22 up to today the name lists of five batches covering about 109 000 employers in total who received wage subsidies and the relevant information."

The spokesman said, "Appropriate monitoring and auditing mechanisms have been put in place under the ESS. During and after the vetting of applications, the Secretariat and/or its processing agent will vet and conduct sample verification of the information submitted by the employers, and conduct on-site checking at those employers' organisations. The work is in progress. Should an employer be found to have abused or violated the conditions of the ESS, the employees concerned or members of the public can make a report to the ESS Secretariat. The Secretariat and the processing agent will follow up on all reports and complaints."

From June 22, when the Secretariat commenced publication of the name lists of employers that have received wage subsidies, to yesterday (July 20), a total of 174 reports have been received. The cases have mainly involved allegations of unreasonable staff reductions and/or dismissal of employees, late payment of wages or pay cuts, company closure or change of operator. The Secretariat and the processing agent are following up the cases and will inform the informants of the results after completing investigation.

If an employer is found, after investigation, to have made a false statement, misinterpreted or concealed the facts, or furnished false or misleading documents or information in an attempt to deceive the Government, the Secretariat and/or the processing agents to obtain any subsidies under the ESS, the employer will be prosecuted. If necessary, the Secretariat will pass the case to relevant enforcement departments for follow-up actions. Should there be complaints relating to provisions under the Employment

Ordinance or labour disputes arising from conditions of employment, the Secretariat will refer the cases to the Labour Department. The Secretariat has referred 21 reports or complaints to the Labour Department and one case to the Customs and Excise Department.

In addition, the ESS Secretariat will commence tomorrow (July 22) the disbursement of wage subsidies to the sixth batch of successful employer applicants, comprising about 11 700 employers, with subsidies totalling over \$4.7 billion and a total committed headcount of paid employees of about 200 000. The ESS has disbursed wage subsidies exceeding \$34.2 billion to nearly 121 000 employers in the six batches, with a total committed headcount of paid employees of about 1.47 million. After excluding 12 000 ineligible applicants who have not been approved for wage subsidies, the ESS Secretariat has completed processing for nearly 80 per cent of the applications received from employers.

The ESS Secretariat will continue to process the remaining some 35 000 applications. The Secretariat reminds that the processing agent has, via email, asked employers who have yet to provide correct bank and/or mandatory provident fund account information to submit the supplementary information as soon as possible. The ESS Secretariat will in these few days remind each of these employers via SMS and email that supplementary information should be submitted on or before July 31 so that the Secretariat can complete the processing of applications under the first tranche of the ESS in early August and commence the preparatory work for the second tranche.

In addition, the Secretariat will commence the disbursement of the \$7,500 one-off lump sum subsidy to the sixth batch Self-employed Persons (SEPs), comprising about 3 600 people, today. The total subsidy involved is \$27 million. Six batches SEPs, with a total of about 90 000 applicants, have already received the one-off lump sum subsidy.