

Employment Support Scheme publishes fourth batch of employers receiving wage subsidies and disburses fifth batch of wage subsidies

The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) Secretariat published on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) today (July 14) the name list of the fourth batch of employers who have received wage subsidies, the amount of subsidies received and their committed headcount of paid employees.

"The name list of the fourth batch of employers published today covers about 11 000 employers. These employers have received wage subsidies totalling about \$6.27 billion (for June to August 2020), and committed to maintain a total paid headcount of about 270 000. Together with the published name list of the first three batches of employers, the Secretariat published from June 22 up to today the name list of four batches of about 100 000 employers who received wage subsidies and the relevant information," a Government spokesman said.

Furthermore, the Secretariat has today commenced the disbursement of wage subsidies to the fifth batch of some 9 000 successful employer applicants, with subsidies totalling about \$4.1 billion and a total committed headcount of paid employees of about 190 000. In other words, five batches of about 110 000 employers have already received wage subsidies, covering about 1.3 million employees, totalling about \$29.5 billion.

The Secretariat is processing the final approval of the sixth batch of wage subsidies. Relevant information will be published upon completion of the process.

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. Some 180 employers' organisations have been checked so far and the work continues.

"Should an employer be found to have abused or violated the conditions of the ESS, the employees concerned or members of the public are encouraged to report it to the ESS Secretariat. The Secretariat and the processing agent will earnestly follow up on all reports and complaints, including conducting on-site checking, reviewing the eligibility of the concerned employers and the amount of subsidies they received, as well as their record of MPF contributions submitted. The Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office has set up a review panel to monitor the progress of cases being handled, as well as to handle and keep in view any special cases."

Since the Secretariat published on June 22 the name list of employers who have received wage subsidies, a total of 115 reports have been received as at July 13. The cases mainly involved unreasonable staff reductions and/or dismissal of employees, late payment of wages or pay cuts, suspected company closures or change of operators. The Secretariat and the processing agent are proactively following up the cases and will inform the informants of the result after completing the 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 17 reports or complaints to the Labour Department and one case to the Customs and Excise Department.

The Secretariat will also commence the disbursement of the \$7,500 one-off lump sum subsidy to the fifth batch of about 2 000 Self-employed Persons (SEPs) today. The total subsidy involved is about \$15 million. Five batches of about 86 000 SEPs have already received the one-off lump sum subsidy.