

Employment Support Scheme publishes sixth batch of employers receiving wage subsidies and prepares to disburse subsidies to seventh batch of applicants

The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) Secretariat published on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) today (July 29) the name list of the sixth batch of employers that have received wage subsidies under the first tranche, the amount of subsidies received and the employers' committed headcount of paid employees.

A Government spokesman said, "The name list of the sixth batch of employers published today covers about 11 600 employers. These employers have received wage subsidies totalling about \$4.7 billion (for June to August 2020), and committed to maintaining a total paid headcount of about 200 000. Together with the published name lists of the first five batches of employers, the Secretariat has published from June 22 up to today the name lists of six batches covering about 120 600 employers who have received wage subsidies and the relevant information."

In addition, the ESS Secretariat will notify the seventh batch of about 17 300 employers of their successful applications within this week, and commence disbursement of wage subsidies next week totalling about \$6.4 billion and covering about 283 000 employees. Together with the first six batches of wage subsidies that have been disbursed, the wage subsidies involved in the seven batches amount to about \$40.5 billion, covering nearly 138 000 employers and a total committed headcount of paid employees of about 1.75 million. Excluding the 12 500 ineligible applicants who have not been approved wage subsidies, the ESS Secretariat has completed processing nearly 90 per cent of the applications received from employers.

The ESS Secretariat is processing the remaining some 18 300 applications. The Secretariat would like to remind again 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 Secretariat has reminded each of these employers via SMS and email that supplementary information must be submitted on or before July 31 so that the Secretariat can complete the processing of the first tranche applications by early August and commence the preparatory work for the second tranche.

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 the sampled employers' organisations. Close to 190 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 can make a report to the ESS Secretariat. The Secretariat and the processing agent will follow up on all reports and complaints."

Since June 22 when the ESS Secretariat first published the name lists of employers that have received wage subsidies, up to yesterday (July 28) a total of 229 reports have been received. The cases involve primarily 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 the Review Panel set up by the Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office will examine the investigation report on each of the report cases. The Secretariat 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 agent to obtain any subsidies under the ESS, the employer may 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 so far referred 26 reports or complaints to the Labour Department and one case to the Customs and Excise Department.

In addition, the Secretariat will commence the disbursement of the \$7,500 one-off lump sum subsidy to the seventh batch of 3 900 Self-employed Persons (SEPs) next week involving a total subsidy of \$29.6 million. Taking into account the latest batch, about 94 000 SEPs will have received the one-off lump sum subsidy, totalling about \$705 million.