

LCQ1: Enhancing the work on employees retraining

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Ngan Man-yu and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 31):

Question:

As pointed out in the 2023 Policy Address, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) will review its service scope, training strategies and operation mode, etc, and submit recommendations in the third quarter of this year. On the other hand, the Government commenced the new round of Manpower Projection (MP) in July last year to gauge the manpower requirements up to 2028. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the ERB will draw reference from the data projected by the new round of MP in its review, and introduce reforms in the light of the manpower market and the demand for new skills, so as to tie in with economic development and meet the needs for manpower training;

(2) given that the eligibility criteria of the Employees Retraining Scheme have been relaxed since December 2007 to cover persons with education level at sub-degree or below, whether the authorities will consider further relaxing the eligibility criteria, including studying the removal of the limit on highest education attainment for enrolment, so as to encourage persons with high educational attainment to pursue continuing education; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that subsidised programmes concerning continuing education and skills upgrading are currently under the purview of different organisations, which may easily lead to course duplication or fragmentation, etc, and hinder the utilisation of resources as well as the coordination and integration of courses, whether the authorities will, in the long run, study putting the Continuing Education Fund under the supervision of the ERB, and having the ERB in charge of the deployment of various types of resources for continuing education?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been committed to nurturing local talent, with provision of significant resources to promote training and retraining so as to enhance the quality and productivity of our local labour force. This at the same time encourages more citizens to enter or re-enter the labour market for unleashing the potential labour force. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) plays an important role in training the local workforce.

Since its establishment in 1992, the ERB has been providing comprehensive and diversified training and retraining services for the local

workforce. Currently, the ERB's major service targets are job-seeking or unemployed local people aged 15 or above with education attainment at the sub-degree level or below. The ERB through approximately 80 training bodies offers around 700 market-oriented training courses for eligible persons, straddling across 28 industries and generic skills.

Over the past period, there have been drastic demographic and structural changes locally. Coupled with the increasingly wide application of technologies across various industries, employers' manpower demand has thus changed. As a result, workers with diverse experience and qualifications are in need for different training and continuous learning. Therefore, the Chief Executive in the 2023 Policy Address invited the ERB to conduct a comprehensive review to promote lifelong learning and skills upgrading for all having regard to Hong Kong's future economic development and manpower training needs.

The ERB's comprehensive review is instrumental to the future development of local manpower training. The review covers key areas of the ERB's services, including its service targets, training strategies, operation mode. The ERB is undertaking the review and has established a dedicated Steering Committee to oversee the process. The Steering Committee is now collecting views through extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders from various sectors.

Dr the Hon Ngan Man-yu's question touches on three major areas, including: (1) the alignment of the provision of the ERB's training courses with the future economic development and emerging skills in the market; (2) the relaxation of eligibility criteria of the service targets in relation to academic qualifications; and (3) the clear positioning of the ERB to consolidate different training resources to enhance efficiency while avoiding duplication in its services with other training institutions and government-funded programmes. These issues raised by the Hon Ngan are precisely the important areas that the ERB's review will cover. In fact, many stakeholders in the ongoing consultation have provided constructive comments on these aspects.

The ERB's review is still underway. The Steering Committee will thoroughly analyse the suggestions gathered during the consultation to formulate appropriate and feasible recommendations. It will submit a report to the Government in the third quarter of this year. The Government does not have a pre-determined position on the review, but has been encouraging the ERB to conduct the review with a forward-looking and open-minded approach to identify strategies relevant to the future direction of the manpower training in Hong Kong. At this stage, the Labour and Welfare Bureau is unable to provide further information regarding the Hon Ngan's question.