

LCQ12: Retraining for the unemployed and underemployed

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (December 2):

Question:

To assist the unemployed and underemployed in upgrading their skills and self-enhancement, with a view to their re-entering the employment market as early as possible, the Government has entrusted the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) to implement the Love Upgrading Special Scheme (the Scheme) to provide such persons with two to three months' integrated training courses. Two phases of the Scheme have been launched so far, with the relevant periods of enrolment being from October 3, 2019 to June 30, 2020 and from July 1 to December 31, 2020 respectively. Regarding the provision of retraining for the unemployed and underemployed, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as it has been reported that among the over 36 000 person-times of applications made under Phase 1 of the Scheme, only about 7 000 person-times have completed the courses, whether it knows the reasons for some trainees' failure to complete the courses;
- (2) whether it knows the up-to-date number of trainees who have been engaged in course-related jobs since completion of the courses under the Scheme;
- (3) whether it knows the respective up-to-date numbers of trainees under the Scheme who have been provided with employment counselling, job referral and placement follow-up services by ERB;
- (4) whether the Government will, in entrusting ERB to roll out a new phase of the Scheme, require ERB to offer courses covering a wider variety of skills, such as those concerning the skills needed for working in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) whether it will consider regularizing the Scheme, so as to assist more unemployed and underemployed persons in taking up employment or switching to other trades; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) launched the first tranche of the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" (the Scheme) in October 2019 to provide employees affected by economic downturn with integrated training for two to three months. After the closing of application for the first tranche in June 2020, ERB launched the enhanced second tranche in July 2020, providing about

300 training courses covering 28 trades' "Vocational Skills", "Generic Skills" (including English, Putonghua, information technology applications and personal attributes) and "Innovation and Technology" (including artificial intelligence, blockchain, Internet business start-up, etc.). Special allowance is provided to trainees during the training period. The Scheme imposes no restriction on the trade or education attainment of trainees, and provides both full-time and part-time (half day/evening) training modes. Trainees who have completed full-time "Vocational Skills" courses would receive follow-up placement services. My reply to various parts of the Member's question is as follows:

(1) Application for the first tranche of the Scheme was closed on June 30, 2020. About 14 000 trainees enrolled in training, and about 13 000 trainees completed 15 844 training courses (note: a trainee may enrol in more than one course), representing about 91 per cent of total trainee enrolment. Some trainees did not complete the course due to personal reasons including getting employed during the training period, health issue, or family issue.

(2)&(3) The training bodies of ERB will start the follow-up placement period of three to six months after completion of classes of the full-time "Vocational Skills" courses under the Scheme. The follow-up placement period of respective classes under the first tranche of the Scheme was extended to end 2020 to early 2021 due to the COVID-19 situation. Hence, no relevant information is available at this stage.

(4) The Scheme currently covers courses such as "Certificate in Business in the Greater Bay Area (E-commerce)(Part-time)" and "Certificate in Business in the Greater Bay Area (5G Internet of Things and Big Data)(Part-time)". ERB will keep a close watch on changes in the labour market, consult stakeholders, and develop new courses in response to market needs.

(5) In the 2020 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that, to further enhance the support to employees affected by the economic downturn, ERB will launch the third tranche of the Scheme in January 2021, enabling 20 000 trainees to receive retraining. In addition, ERB will continue to assist unemployed persons to re-enter the labour market through about 140 000 training places each year under its regular training courses.