

LCQ15: Love Upgrading Special Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

Entrusted by the Government, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) launched in October 2019 the first tranche of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme (the Scheme) to provide employees affected by the economic downturn with two to three months' integrated training so as to assist them in upgrading their skills and pursuing self-enhancement, with a view to their re-entering the employment market expeditiously. The ERB launched the second and third tranches of the Scheme in July last year and in January this year respectively. Under the Scheme, each trainee may attend up to four training courses. Trainees who have completed a course with an attendance rate of 60 per cent may be disbursed a special allowance. The amount of allowance payable monthly to each trainee is subject to a ceiling, which was initially set at \$4,000 and increased to \$5,800 in May 2020. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows, in respect of (a) the first tranche and (b) the second tranche of the Scheme, the respective (i) numbers of trainees who completed the courses, (ii) highest, lowest and median amounts of special allowance disbursed to such trainees, and (iii) numbers and percentages of trainees, among those to whom special allowance was disbursed, who were disbursed an amount of allowance that reached the monthly ceiling for at least one month (set out in a table);

(2) whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the Scheme and conducted a questionnaire survey on the trainees who have completed the courses (including looking into their levels of satisfaction with the Scheme/courses); if so, of the details and the findings; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that eligible trainees who have completed full-time vocational skills courses under the Scheme may be provided with follow-up placement services (including employment counselling, job referral and placement follow-up) for three to six months, whether it knows how such services have helped the trainees under the first and second tranches of the Scheme successfully secure employment, including the number of trainees who have found a job as a result of the services;

(4) of the reasons why trainees are encouraged under the Scheme to participate in cross-industry training; whether it has compiled statistics on the respective numbers and percentages of trainees, among the trainees under the second and third tranches of the Scheme, who have enrolled in cross-industry training courses; if so, of the details;

(5) given that unemployed persons who dropped out of school or graduated on or after June 10, 2019 may participate in the Scheme, whether it knows the number of fresh graduates who have enrolled in the courses offered under the second tranche of the Scheme;

(6) whether it knows, since the implementation of the Scheme, the respective top 10 courses with (i) the highest number of enrolment and (ii) the highest number of trainees who found a related job within the first three months upon completion of the training; and

(7) whether the authorities will consider further raising the ceiling of the amount of the special allowance?

Reply:

President,

The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) launched the first and second tranches of the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" (the Special Scheme) in October 2019 and July 2020 respectively to provide employees affected by economic downturn with integrated training courses for two to three months. The ERB launched the third tranche of the Special Scheme in January this year, with the quota doubled to 20 000 trainees and the number of training courses increased to about 450 covering "Vocational Skills", "Generic Skills" and "Innovation and Technology" in 28 trades. Special allowance is provided to trainees during the training period. The Special 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) As at December 31, 2020, about 14 700 trainees completed 16 600 training courses (Note 1: a trainee may enrol in more than one course) under the first tranche of the Special Scheme. The highest amount of special allowance disbursed to a trainee who had completed course was about \$8,700; the lowest amount was about \$230 (Note 2: duration of this course was 12 hours), or about \$3,100 per trainee on average (Note 3: including full-time and part-time courses). Under the second tranche of the Special Scheme, about 13 700 trainees completed 16 400 training courses. The highest amount of special allowance disbursed to a trainee who had completed course was about \$8,700; the lowest amount was about \$230 (Note 2), or about \$2,200 per trainee on average. The allowance is calculated based on the actual number of class sessions attended and disbursed upon completion of each course. The ERB does not separately maintain the amount of special allowance disbursed to trainees per month.

(2) The ERB invites trainees to complete opinion survey before the end of each training course to understand their views. According to the surveys completed from October 2019 to September 2020, over 90 per cent of trainees were satisfied with the training course they enrolled in.

(3) The training bodies of the ERB start the follow-up placement period of three to six months upon completion of classes of full-time "Vocational Skills" courses under the Special Scheme. As at December 31, 2020, the placement rate of trainees enrolled in the full-time "Vocational Skills" courses under the first tranche of the Special Scheme was about 81 per cent. The follow-up placement period of respective classes under the second tranche of the Special Scheme was extended to the first half of 2021 due to the COVID-19 situation. Hence, no relevant information is available at this stage.

(4) The ERB provides market-driven and employment-oriented courses and placement follow-up services, with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of local employees and facilitating their sustainable employment. Trainees may participate in training courses having regards to their interest and needs, including cross-industry training, to meet the fast changing needs of the employment market. Under the second tranche of the Special Scheme, about 90 per cent of trainees enrolled in courses of another industry. The third tranche of the Special Scheme was launched in January 2021, and no relevant information is available at this stage.

(5) Under the second tranche of the Special Scheme, about 1 400 trainees declared their employment status as "non-engaged" in their application for enrolment.

(6) As at December 31, 2020, the top 10 training courses under the Special Scheme by application for enrolment and placement rate respectively are at Annex.

(7) The statutory cap of retraining allowance was increased from \$4,000 to \$5,800 in May 2020, i.e. a 45 per cent increase. There is currently no plan to further raise the cap.