

LCQ22: Employment services

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 (November 6):

Question:

As pointed out in Report No. 72 of the Director of Audit published in April this year, several indicators showed that the performance of the employment services of the Labour Department (LD) had been unsatisfactory in recent years: the numbers of visitors to the 13 job centres and three industry-based recruitment centres decreased continuously; the number of visits to the Interactive Employment Service (iES) website decreased continuously; and the dedicated employment services provided for young people, the elderly and middle-aged, people with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities were plagued with various problems, including decreased numbers of participants, as well as low retention rates and short retention periods for job placements. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of visitors to the 13 job centres and the Construction Industry Recruitment Centre, as well as the respective numbers of job fairs and sharing sessions organised by the job centres and the attendances thereof, in the past six months;

(2) whether LD will improve the designs of the iES website and mobile application to better suit the needs of job seekers, enrich their contents (e.g. providing more templates for writing job application letters and curriculum vitae, and information on job interview skills), and step up the relevant publicity efforts, so as to boost their utilisation rates; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as the Government plans to provide a retention allowance to the participants of the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM), the Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme, of the details (including the implementation date);

(4) of the new measures put in place to attract more employers to participate in EPEM, so as to increase the employment opportunities for the elderly and middle-aged; and

(5) of the new measures put in place to boost the completion rates of on-the-job training by YETP participants?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) From April to September 2019, there were 172 266 and 6 127 visitors to the 13 job centres and Construction Industry Recruitment Centre of LD respectively. Over the same period, the job centres organised 503 district-based job fairs, with 17 473 on-the-spot job interviews arranged for job seekers attending the events. The job centres also conducted four experience sharing sessions for employers, and 83 employer representatives attended.

(2) LD's Interactive Employment Service (iES) website is one of the most visited government websites. Apart from searching for job vacancies, job seekers can obtain a wide range of employment information, such as templates of job application letter and curriculum vitae, job interview techniques and frequently asked questions, precautions on job traps, etc., from the website. Various dedicated webpages have also been set up under the website to cater for the needs of different job seekers (such as the elderly and ethnic minorities) and employers. LD will enhance the functionality and design of the iES website and its mobile application on a continuous basis to provide job seekers and employers with more convenient online employment services and better user experience. LD will also continue to enrich the content of the mobile application by incorporating more useful and updated employment information. Moreover, LD will continue to strengthen the publicity of the iES website and its mobile application through various channels, including other government websites, large-scale job fairs, promotional leaflets and display boards, etc., to increase their usage.

(3) LD will launch a pilot scheme to encourage the elderly aged 60 or above, young people and persons with disabilities to undergo and complete on-the-job training (OJT) under its employment programmes through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. These employees, to be engaged under Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM), Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme, will be offered a retention allowance of \$3,000 if they stay in the OJT posts for three months. Thereafter, the employee will receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 for each ensuing month when he/she stays in the same job until his/her completion of the six to 12-month OJT. If the relevant employee takes up a part-time OJT post, he/she will be entitled to half the amount payable to a full-time employee. Subject to the length of the OJT period, the maximum amount of retention allowance that a full-time employee may receive is \$12,000. The three-year pilot measure is planned for launching in 2020.

(4) LD has enhanced EPEM in September 2018 and significantly increased the OJT allowance payable to employers for engaging each job seeker aged 60 or above from the original ceiling of \$3,000 per month for three to six months to a maximum of \$4,000 per month for six to 12 months. According to statistics after the enhancement, there has been a discernible increase in the number of applications by employers for OJT allowance, in particular, those involving job seekers aged 60 or above.

In addition, LD has stepped up its promotional efforts to encourage employers to join EPEM. These include: (i) promoting EPEM to employers, trade unions and institutes of various industries through the industry-based tripartite committee meetings organised by LD; (ii) strengthening the promotion of EPEM to employers participating in LD's job fairs; and (iii) publicising EPEM through placing advertisements in public transports, etc.

(5) Apart from the provision of retention allowance to trainees undergoing OJT under YETP to encourage them to complete OJT as mentioned in part (3) of the reply, LD has, since July 2019, compiled monthly statistical reports on the reasons for early termination of OJTs. For trainees whose OJTs are ended prematurely due to inadequate work skills or personal performance issues (e.g. behavioural problems), LD will approach the case managers concerned for appropriate follow-up actions with an aim to enhance the trainees' employability and job stability through better equipping themselves.