

LCQ7: Measures to facilitate employment of persons with disabilities

Following is a question by the Hon Gary Fan and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 16):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Disability 2013, the unemployment rate of those working-age persons with disabilities (PWDs) who participated in the labour market was 6.7 per cent in 2013, which was notably higher than the overall rate of the same age group (3.7 per cent). On the other hand, the Labour Department has since 2005 been implementing the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) under which wage subsidy is granted to employers who employ PWDs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) among the PWDs employed under WOPS in each of the years from 2015 to 2018, of the respective numbers and percentages of those who were still working for the same employer on expiry of 12 months after appointment;
- (2) whether it assessed, in the past three years, the effectiveness of the various measures currently implemented to facilitate employment of PWDs (including WOPS, Talent-Wise Employment Charter and the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) given that some non-profit-making organisations have suggested the Government to introduce more appealing measures (e.g. provision of tax concessions) to encourage the commercial sector to employ PWDs, whether the Government will consider adopting such suggestion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, I provide a consolidated reply to the Member's question as follows:

- (1) The Labour Department (LD) implements the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage employers to hire job seekers with disabilities and provide them with coaching and support through the provision of an allowance. The LD recorded 811, 816, 802 and 796 placements under the WOPS from 2015 to 2018 respectively. In 2015 and 2016 (Note), there were 241 and 230 cases respectively where the employees with disabilities concerned were employed for over 12 months, representing 30 per cent and 28 per cent

respectively of the annual totals for the two years. According to the information provided by the LD, employment contracts under the WOPS were terminated mostly owing to the resignation of employees with disabilities. Dismissal by employers only accounted for a minority of the termination cases. The main reasons for employees with disabilities to resign were their inability to adapt to the new job, their wish to change to a new working environment and their finding a better job. On the other hand, employers dismissed employees with disabilities mainly because of the latter's performance issues.

(2) The LD reviews from time to time the implementation of the WOPS, and conducts questionnaire surveys on the WOPS to collect the views of the participating employers each year. In the light of the review outcomes, the LD launched enhancement measures in September 2018 to further encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities who have employment difficulties and assist them in settling in their new posts. Under these enhancement measures, the maximum allowance payable to employers for each of these employees has been increased by \$16,000 to a total of \$51,000, with the maximum period of allowance payable extended from eight to nine months. Last year, the Social Welfare Department reviewed the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities (Sunnyway), and has, starting from 2018-19, extended the follow-up period for post-placement support for Sunnyway participants with disabilities from 6 to 12 months. The Government also reviews various relevant schemes from time to time, and proactively encourages different sectors of the community and government departments to adopt appropriate measures to promote internship and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

(3) The Government will continue to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities through providing the former with financial incentives, and will review and enhance the relevant measures on an ongoing basis. Such measures include providing an allowance for employers to encourage them to hire persons with disabilities (the maximum allowance payable to employers for each job seeker with disabilities who have employment difficulties hired is \$51,000 and the maximum period of allowance payable is nine months); giving employers who hire persons with disabilities a subsidy for purchasing assistive devices and carrying out workplace modification (employers may apply for a maximum subsidy of \$20,000 for each person with disabilities employed for carrying out workplace modification and/or purchasing assistive devices, or a maximum subsidy of \$40,000 for purchasing a single assistive device and its essential accessories); and offering grants to non-governmental organisations for setting up social enterprises (the maximum funding support per business is \$3 million).

Note: As the 12-month follow-up period for some WOPS placements in 2017 is just over, the LD is collating information on the employment situation of the employees with disabilities concerned for compiling relevant statistics for that year. Besides, since a vast majority of employees with disabilities placed under the WOPS in 2018 have been employed for less than 12 months, figures for 2017 and 2018 regarding employees with disabilities employed for over 12 months are not yet available.