

Second-term Human Resources Planning Commission convenes second meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the second meeting of the second-term Human Resources Planning Commission this afternoon (October 19).

At the meeting, members were briefed on the key findings of a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market of the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region and the policy responses of different APAC economies. The study was conducted by a third-party consultant commissioned by Microsoft. The study pointed out that the pandemic has taken a toll on the global economy, resulting in a sharp deterioration in the labour market. The labour market of the APAC region was particularly affected owing to the region's populous nature. Besides directly causing tens of thousands of workers to lose their jobs, the pandemic has indirectly brought about structural changes to different industries, accelerating the digital transformation of enterprises.

In the face of the challenges brought about by the pandemic, different APAC economies have already adopted multi-pronged measures with a view to preserving employment, creating jobs, promoting upskilling for the local labour force, as well as assisting businesses in adopting automation.

In Hong Kong, to provide relief to businesses and individuals hard hit by the pandemic and directly affected by the Government's anti-epidemic and social distancing measures, the Government rolled out three rounds of measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund. Key measures include the Employment Support Scheme, which provides wage subsidies to employers; the "Job Creation" initiative, which provides around 30 000 time-limited jobs; and the Distance Business Programme, which subsidises companies to adopt information technology solutions for developing distance business. Members noted the key findings of the study and offered suggestions on how the Government could better assist the local labour force to cope with the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Members were also briefed on the retraining services provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) during the pandemic to assist the unemployed and the underemployed to upgrade their skills and re-enter the employment market as early as possible.

The ERB currently offers over 700 training courses covering nearly 30 industries. In the past three years, more than 100 000 trainees enrolled in ERB training courses annually. To support the unemployed or underemployed affected by the economic downturn for skills enhancement, the ERB was commissioned by the Government to launch the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" (the Special Scheme) in October 2019, offering training courses of around two to three months to trainees free of charge. In view of the positive response, the Government has decided to extend the Special Scheme and tasked the ERB to launch Phase 2 of the Special Scheme in July 2020. Several enhancements were

introduced in Phase 2 of the Special Scheme, including substantially increasing the number of training courses to about 300, raising the ceiling of the monthly allowance per trainee from \$4,000 to \$5,800, as well as introducing the "Enterprise-based Training" as a new arrangement to support corporations or trade associations in arranging their employees or staff of corporate members who are underemployed or taking no-pay leave owing to the economic downturn to attend courses under the Special Scheme.

Members noted the retraining services provided by the ERB during the pandemic and discussed how to further enhance Hong Kong's retraining services to address the current needs.