

## Labour Department adjusts and enhances employment services

The Labour Department (LD) today (March 13) announced that, in view of the increasing popularity of online employment services among the general public and to utilise public resources more effectively, the LD will adjust and enhance its employment services starting from April 2 to meet job seekers' needs and suit market circumstances.

The LD's Telephone Employment Service Centre will introduce voicemail service. Members of the public can leave messages and request services by calling the hotlines for job seekers (2969 0888) and employers (2503 3377) outside office hours and following the instructions provided. Staff will follow up and respond as soon as possible within the following working day.

The service hours of the LD's job centres and industry-based recruitment centres will also be extended from the current 9am to 5.30 pm to 9am to 6.15 pm from Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays). The centres will be closed on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, following the five-day week arrangement. Moreover, the Hong Kong West Job Centre on Hong Kong Island and the Tai Po Job Centre in New Territories East will merge with job centres in the nearby districts respectively to provide services to the public. For the addresses and service hours of the job centres, please visit the LD's Interactive Employment Service (iES) website ([www.jobs.gov.hk/en/c](http://www.jobs.gov.hk/en/c)).

The LD has been providing diversified and free employment services for job seekers. Apart from services provided by job centres and recruitment centres, the LD's iES website and mobile application provide round-the-clock online employment services and employment information to enable job seekers to search for job vacancies and submit job applications online. Registered job seekers can also call the hotline for job seekers of the Telephone Employment Service Centre to obtain job referrals without having to visit job centres in person for the services.

The LD will continue to review services provided in a timely manner, and implement measures to enhance services in light of the service needs and market situation with a view to enhancing service efficiency.

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## LCQ17: Technology Voucher Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Robert Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (March 13):

Question:

The Government launched enhancement measures for the Technology Voucher Programme (TVP) in April 2020, including increasing the funding ceiling and the maximum number of approved projects. Nonetheless, it is learnt that at present, many enterprises, especially small and medium-sized financial intermediaries, still encounter many difficulties in making applications under TVP. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of TVP applicants from the financial services industry, of (i) the number of applications received and its proportion to the total number of TVP applications, (ii) the average vetting and approval time per application, (iii) the success rate of applications, (iv) the average amount of funding applied for per application, and (v) the average amount of subsidy approved per application, in each of the past three years;

(2) as many members of the financial services industry have relayed that they face problems in making applications under TVP as regards its complicated procedures, long vetting and approval time, as well as the small amount of approved subsidy, whether the authorities will consider further streamlining the application procedures of TVP, expediting the vetting and approval time, and increasing the amount of approved subsidy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) since the launch of the enhancement measures, how TVP has been enhanced in terms of the success rate of applications, flexibility in vetting and approval, etc.; and

(4) given that while the Government has launched the four-in-one integrated services to provide enterprises with consolidated and comprehensive information of various government funding schemes (including TVP) as well as consultation services, many members of the industry have relayed that they still have no in-depth understanding of such services, of the authorities' plans in place to step up publicity and promotion to help the industry grasp the details of such services, so as to increase the success rate of applications under TVP?

Reply:

President,

The Technology Voucher Programme (TVP) under the Innovation and Technology Fund administered by the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC), aims to support local enterprises/organisations in using technological services and solutions to improve productivity, or upgrade or transform their business processes. Having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), our reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In the past 3 years, statistics on applications relevant to the "Banking, Insurance and Financial Services Sector" under TVP are as below:

The annual number of applications received, and their proportion to the total number of applications received

	Number of applications received under "Banking, Insurance and Financial Services Sector"	Proportion to the total number of applications received under the TVP
2021	178	3.14 per cent
2022	266	2.04 per cent
2023	252	1.54 per cent

The average processing time for each application is around 25 working days upon receipt of full information and necessary supporting documents, with the application success rate of around 98 per cent. The average requested funding amount for each application is \$236,000, and the average approved funding amount for each application is \$171,000.

(2)&(3) ITC attaches great importance to the feedbacks on the TVP from the industry, and reviews its funding arrangement and introduces enhancement measures from time to time to encourage and facilitate the utilisation of TVP by the industries. Since the launch of TVP in 2016, ITC has implemented a series of enhancement measures in a timely manner having regard to its operational experience and the feedbacks from the industries. These include, from April 2020 onwards, the cumulative funding ceiling of each enterprise/organisation has been increased from the initial \$200,000 to \$600,000, whereas the maximum number of projects funded has been increased from three to six. The Government funding ratio has also been raised from two-thirds to three-quarters.

Following ITC's introduction of various enhancement measures in April 2020, there was a substantial increase in the number of applications from 2 641 in 2019-20 to 7 028 in 2020-21. As the increase far exceeded ITC's manpower capacity, to expedite the processing of applications, ITC appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) as the secretariat of TVP on June 8, 2021, making use of HKPC's human resources and rich experience in order to enhance the efficiency in processing applications.

With the concerted efforts of ITC and HKPC, in 2022 and 2023, 12 387 and 10 906 applications were approved respectively. Compared with the 1 536 and 3 787 applications approved in 2020 and 2021 respectively, there was a significant increase in the processing capacity. During the period from 2020 to 2023, the success rate of TVP applications maintained at a level of over 97 per cent.

Furthermore, ITC and HKPC introduced an electronic procurement platform in October 2022 to offer enterprises/organisations a brand new and convenient procurement means in addition to the traditional channel, which allows applicants to obtain quotations of competitive prices in a completely open, fair and transparent manner. At the same time, the platform provides opportunities for more service providers to participate in the TVP projects

by way of fair competition. Procurement conducted through the aforementioned electronic platform is not subject to the minimum requirement on number of quotations, thereby increasing the flexibility of application assessment.

ITC will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the TVP and the feedbacks from the industries and introduce enhancements in a timely manner in order to assist more enterprises in upgrading and transformation.

(4) According to information provided by CEDB, to raise the awareness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) of the Government's various support measures, the Government has consolidated the services of the four SME centres in October 2019, namely the "Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs" (SUCCESS) under the Trade and Industry Department (TID), the "SME Centre" under the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the "SME One" under HKPC and the "TecONE" under Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, to provide "four-in-one" integrated services, so that SMEs can receive information on doing business, funding schemes and support services as well as consultation and referral services in any one of the aforementioned centres. As at end-January 2024, the four SME centres have handled over 200 000 enquiries. TID also launched a one-stop web portal "SME Link" in June 2022, which allows SMEs to access information, including that on government funding schemes (including TVP), on a single online platform.

In addition, "SME ReachOut", operated by the Government through HKPC, commenced operation in January 2020 to help SMEs identify suitable government funding schemes and answer questions related to applications, and organise or participate in various activities to promote government funding schemes. The Financial Secretary announced in the 2023-24 Budget that \$100 million would be allocated to HKPC to gradually enhance the services of "SME ReachOut". These include arranging visits to more chambers of commerce, commercial and industrial buildings and co-working spaces, as well as increasing the publicity in social media, and providing more one-on-one consultation sessions. As at end-January 2024, "SME ReachOut" has handled over 20 400 enquiries, organised or participated in 10 exhibitions and over 50 seminars or webinars, as well as conducted over 210 promotional activities. SMEs can obtain information about TVP through "SME ReachOut".

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## **LCQ12: Security Personnel Permit**

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (March 13):

Question:

Currently, security personnel performing guarding work not requiring the

carrying of arms and ammunition must be holders of either a Category A or Category B Security Personnel Permit (SPP), and persons aged 71 or above can only apply for Category A SPPs, i.e. they can only perform guarding work for single private residential buildings. Some members of the industry hope that the Government can relax the relevant restriction on account of factors such as the manpower shortage, ageing population, and improving health of the elderly, so that persons aged 71 or above can apply for Category B SPPs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of SPP holders in Hong Kong, together with a breakdown by permit category (i.e. Category A and Category B); whether it has estimated the number of security personnel who need to change to apply for Category A SPPs upon reaching the age of 71 or above in each of the coming five years;

(2) whether it will review the existing arrangement under which security personnel aged 71 or above can only perform Category A guarding work for single private residential buildings; and

(3) as it is learnt that there are fewer jobs for Category A guarding work in the market, whether the authorities will consider relaxing the upper age limit for Category B SPP applications, so that persons aged 71 or above can apply for Category B SPPs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Security and Guarding Services Ordinance (Cap. 460) (the Ordinance) was enacted by the Government in 1994 to provide for a regulatory regime for the security services industry. The Security and Guarding Services Industry Authority (SGSIA), established under the Ordinance to regulate the security industry, is a statutory body responsible for formulating the criteria and conditions for issuing a security personnel permit (SPP), including setting the upper age limits for SPP applications. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) is responsible for issuing SPPs to individuals performing security work.

There are four categories of SPPs, namely Categories A, B, C and D, classified according to the different types of security work and requirements for security personnel. A Category A SPP is for general guarding work not requiring the carrying of arms and ammunition for a single private residential building. There is no upper age limit due to the relatively simple job nature and requirements. A Category B SPP is for all other general guarding work not requiring the carrying of arms and ammunition. As various types of premises and a wider range of job duties are involved, the upper age limit of Category B SPP holders is 70 (i.e. those who have reached the age of 70 are not allowed to perform Category B security work). In issuing the SPPs, the HKPF allows all persons permitted to perform Category B security work to perform Category A security work as well.

In consultation with the HKPF and the SGSIA, my reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at February 29, 2024, there were 360 607 SPP holders in Hong Kong, of which 19 074 were permitted to perform Category A security work only, and 335 084 were permitted to perform both Category A and Category B security work. When a Category B SPP holder reaches the age of 70, he/she can continue to perform Category A security work within the validity period of the SPP and need not apply for another SPP, but he/she must cease performing Category B security work.

According to police records, among the above 335 084 SPP holders permitted to perform Category B security work, the number of persons who will reach the age of 70 and only be allowed to perform Category A security work in each of the next five years is as follows:

Year	Number of persons reaching the age of 70
2025	6 632
2026	7 932
2027	9 535
2028	10 954
2029	12 211

(2) and (3) To ensure the quality of security services, when formulating the criteria for issuing Category A SPP, the SGSIA has taken into consideration that the fitness requirement for security personnel performing security work for a single private residential building is relatively lenient and therefore no upper age limit has been set for Category A SPP holders. In contrast, a Category B SPP is for security work in various types of premises including housing estates, shopping centres, commercial buildings and industrial buildings, which requires a certain degree of physical ability, alertness and technological know-how of the SPP holders. It is therefore necessary to set an upper age limit. The SGSIA communicates with the industry regularly to understand its needs and opinions, and reviews the criteria and conditions for issuing SPPs from time to time. In fact, in 2015, in the light of the demographic changes in Hong Kong and the demand for labour in the market, the SGSIA raised the upper age limit for Category B SPP holders from 65 to 70 upon consultation with the industry.

On account of the actual operation and needs of the security and guarding services industry, as well as the opinions of different stakeholders, the SGSIA considers restricting a Category A SPP holder to work for a single private residential building under the existing arrangement appropriate. In addition, to ensure that Category B SPP holders possess the required level of physical ability and capability to perform their duties, it is not advisable to raise the relevant upper age limit for the time being. The SGSIA will monitor closely the development of the industry and continue to communicate with the industry stakeholders.

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## Red flags hoisted at some beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (March 13) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; and Silverstrand Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.

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## Application for rental of market stalls at FEHD Skylight Market in Tin Shui Wai opens today

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) announced today (March 13) that rental of two market stalls at the FEHD Skylight Market in Tin Shui Wai is open for application starting today.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "Located next to Tin Sau Road Park in Tin Shui Wai, the FEHD Skylight Market adopts a new management model, including strengthening the role of the service contractor in managing the market, e.g. formulating market promotion and development strategies, engagement and collaboration with stakeholders, making proposals on the trade mix of the market, with a view to enhancing business vibrancy and meeting the needs of the public. Being the landlord of the Skylight Market, the FEHD is responsible for determining the rental level and signing agreements with tenants, and has engaged a service contractor through open tender to help carry out the daily management and operation of the market. Two market stalls, namely one siu mei lo mei stall and one fruit stall, are open for application from March 13 to 26."

Applicants should be aged 18 or above and ordinarily reside in Hong Kong. Application forms can be downloaded from the FEHD website ([www.fehd.gov.hk](http://www.fehd.gov.hk)) or obtained at the District Environmental Hygiene Offices. The completed application form together with supporting documents shall be delivered at or before 5.45pm on March 26 by fax (2477 5099), email ([tswmkt@fehd.gov.hk](mailto:tswmkt@fehd.gov.hk)), in person or by post to the Yuen Long District

Environmental Hygiene Office. Applicants can also fill in the online application form and submit the application online. Late applications will not be accepted.

The priority order of eligible applicants in selecting a market stall for rental will be generated by open computer balloting. The date of ballot is scheduled for April 10. The result will be uploaded onto the FEHD website ([www.fehd.gov.hk](http://www.fehd.gov.hk)) on the next day after the computer balloting for checking by the applicants. The FEHD will subsequently issue letters to notify successful applicants of the stall rental arrangements.