

Chapter 5

Employment Services

The Programme of Employment Services

www.labour.gov.hk/eng/service/content.htm

5.1 The objective of the Employment Services Programme is to provide a comprehensive range of free and efficient employment assistance and counselling services to help job seekers find suitable jobs and employers fill their vacancies. We achieve this by :

- providing user-friendly employment services to employers and job seekers;
- offering intensive employment-related assistance and personalised service to vulnerable groups of unemployed people;
- assisting young people to enhance their employability and advising them on careers choice;
- regulating local employment agencies;
- safeguarding the interests of local employees employed by employers outside Hong Kong to work in other territories; and
- ensuring that employment opportunities for local workers are not adversely affected by abuse of the labour importation scheme.

5.2 The principal legislation administered by this programme area includes the Employment Agency Regulations made under the Employment Ordinance (EO) and the Contracts for Employment Outside Hong Kong Ordinance.

5.3 The Employment Agency Regulations, together with Part XII of EO, regulate the operation of employment agencies in Hong Kong through licensing, inspection, investigation and prosecution.

5.4 The Contracts for Employment Outside Hong Kong Ordinance safeguards the interests of local manual workers and those non-manual employees with monthly wages not exceeding \$20,000 who are recruited by employers outside Hong Kong to work in other territories through the attestation of employment contracts for these jobs.

Our Work and Achievements in 2013

Employment Situation in Hong Kong

- 5.5** The Labour Department (LD) recorded a total of 1 216 735 vacancies offered by employers of the private sector for free recruitment service in 2013, an increase of 6.3 per cent when compared with 1 144 424 in 2012. For updated statistics on the labour force, unemployment rate and underemployment rate, please visit the webpage:

www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables/index.jsp?chargetID=1&subjectID=2&tableID=006

- 5.6** The economy of Hong Kong remained stable and the local employment market was buoyant in 2013 with the unemployment rate staying at a low level of 3.4%. In the year, a total of 156 727 placements were secured. (Figures 5.1 and 5.2)

A Wider Service Choice

Services offered at Job Centres

- 5.7** Job seekers can select suitable vacancies and seek referral service at all job centres, including the “Employment in One-stop” (EOS) at Tin Shui Wai. Modern facilities such as digital display system, touchscreen vacancy search terminals, fax machines, toll-free telephones, computers connected to the Internet and a resource corner are available.

Telephone Employment Service

- 5.8** Job seekers registered at LD may call our Telephone Employment Service Centre on 2969 0888 for job referral service. Through conference calls, staff of the Centre can make arrangement for job seekers to talk to employers direct.

On-line Employment Service

5.9 Our Interactive Employment Service (iES) website (www.jobs.gov.hk) provides round-the-clock on-line employment service and comprehensive employment information. iES was one of the most popular government websites, recording 0.38 billion page views in 2013. It hosts a number of dedicated webpages for specific clientele. Job seekers can also use the iES smartphone application to look for suitable vacancies in the job vacancy database of LD anytime and anywhere.

Central Processing of Job Vacancies

5.10 Employers who need to recruit staff can send their vacancy information to our Job Vacancy Processing Centre by fax (2566 3331) or through the Internet (www.jobs.gov.hk). The vacancy information is then disseminated through a network of 12 job centres (including EOS), two recruitment centres for the catering and retail industries, the iES website and vacancy search terminals located in various sites throughout the territory after vetting.

Special Recruitment and Promotional Activities

5.11 We organise a variety of activities to promote our employment services and appeal for vacancies from employers. Job fairs are held to facilitate job seekers and employers to meet and communicate direct. To assist job seekers living in remote areas in securing employment, we held large-scale job fairs in Tuen Mun, Tung Chung and Sheung Shui in 2013. Moreover, to respond more promptly to the recruitment needs of employers and provide a more user-friendly service to job seekers of different districts, we held district-based job fairs at job centres (including EOS) to assist employers to recruit local staff and to enable job seekers to participate in job interviews without having to travel long distance. In the year, 14 large-scale job fairs and 492 district-based job fairs were held, attracting over 50 000 job seekers.



Intensified Services for the Needy

Middle-aged Job Seekers

5.12 The Employment Programme for the Middle-aged (EPM) was launched to assist the unemployed aged 40 or above to find work. Employers who engage an eligible middle-aged job seeker in a full-time permanent job and offer him/her on-the-job training are entitled to claim training allowance. To encourage employers to offer more openings to the middle-aged with employment difficulties and provide them with on-the-job training, LD enhanced EPM in June 2013 by increasing the upper limit of training allowance payable to participating employers from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per month per employee engaged, for a period of three to six months. In 2013, a total of 2 562 placements were secured through the programme.

Work Trial Scheme (WTS)

5.13 WTS was launched to enhance the employability of job seekers who have special difficulties in finding jobs. There is no age limit for applicants. During the one-month work-trial without employer-employee relationship, participants take up jobs offered by participating organisations. On satisfactory completion of the one-month work trial, each participant will receive an allowance of \$6,400, of which \$500 will be contributed by the participating organisation. In 2013, a total of 345 job seekers were placed into work trials.

Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (WITS) Scheme

5.14 Since October 2011, the territory-wide WITS Scheme has been open for application with a view to helping low-income earners reduce their cost of travelling to and from work and encouraging them to secure or stay in employment. Qualified applicants may apply for WITS for the previous six to 12 months in each application, with the monthly subsidy of \$600 (or \$300 at half-rate). Based on the enhancement measures of the scheme taking effect since 2013, applicants may choose to apply on an individual or household basis. The income and asset limits for the subsidy had also been raised concurrently under the annual adjustment mechanism. As at year end, a total of 63 974 applicants received subsidies totalling \$513 million.

New Arrivals and Ethnic Minorities

5.15 We provide through our job centres a comprehensive range of employment services to new arrivals and ethnic minority job seekers. These include employment counselling, job referral, tailor-made employment briefing and employment information. Those who have difficulties finding jobs are encouraged to participate in various employment programmes to enhance their employability. We also proactively promote our recruitment activities to them so as to speed up their job search.

Workers affected by Large-scale Retrenchment

5.16 In major business closure or redundancy cases, LD sets up hotlines for enquiry and special counters at job centres to provide special employment services to affected employees. We canvass suitable vacancies from employers to facilitate job search of the affected employees. In addition, under LD's iES website, we set up a dedicated webpage to display vacancies offered by employers interested in recruiting job seekers who lost their jobs in recent closure or redundancy exercises. In 2013, we offered such special employment services to some 1 700 affected employees.

Job Seekers with Disabilities

5.17 The Selective Placement Division (SPD) offers employment assistance to job seekers with disabilities looking for open employment. Placement officers provide personalised employment services, including employment counseling, job matching and referral and post placement follow-up services. In 2013, SPD registered 2 605 job seekers with disabilities and secured 2 461 placements. (Figure 5.3)

Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS)

5.18 WOPS was launched to facilitate open employment of persons with disabilities by encouraging employers to offer job vacancies to persons with disabilities through the provision of an allowance. Since 1 June 2013, the allowance payable to employers under WOPS has been further increased. An eligible employer who employs persons with disabilities having employment difficulties is entitled to an allowance equivalent to the amount of actual salary paid to an employee with disabilities less \$500 per month during the first two months of employment, subject to a monthly allowance ceiling of \$5,500. After the first two months, the employer is entitled to an allowance equivalent to two-thirds of the actual salary paid to the employee concerned, subject to an allowance ceiling of \$4,000 per month, and for a maximum payment period up to six months. WOPS also provides pre-employment training to persons with disabilities with a view to enhancing their employability. In 2013, 661 placements were secured through the scheme.

Self Help Integrated Placement Service (SHIPS)

5.19 SHIPS aims at improving the job-searching skills of job seekers with disabilities and encouraging them to be more proactive in search for jobs, thereby enhancing their employment opportunities. In 2013, 300 job seekers with disabilities participated in the programme.

Interactive Selective Placement Service (iSPS) Website

5.20 The iSPS website (www.jobs.gov.hk/isps) provides employment services for job seekers with disabilities and employers through the Internet. The website enables persons with disabilities to register with the SPD, browse job vacancy information and perform preliminary job-matching. It also enables employers to place vacancy orders, identify suitable job seekers with disabilities to fill their vacancies and request SPD to refer candidates to them for selection interview. The website facilitates employers to browse information on the work capacity of persons with disabilities more readily. At the same time, it helps persons with disabilities to access various on-line employment services and other related support services.

Promotional Activities

5.21 To enhance public understanding of the working abilities of persons with disabilities as well as to publicise the services of SPD and WOPS, SPD conducted a series of promotional activities, such as exhibitions, production of publications and advertisements, broadcast of promotional videos, promotional visits, promotional messages through newspapers, radio channels, public utilities companies and public transport vehicles, etc during the year. In addition, a large-scale seminar was held for employers and human resources practitioners. Visits were paid and publicity materials were sent to employers of different trades with a view to canvassing job vacancies for persons with disabilities.

Services for Young People

Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP)

5.22 To enhance the employability of young people, LD administers YETP, a “through-train” programme providing seamless and comprehensive youth training and employment support to young school leavers aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below.

5.23 Trainees can enrol on a year-round basis and are entitled to a full range of coordinated and customised training and employment support services, including pre-employment training, one-month workplace attachment training, on-the-job training of six to 12 months, reimbursement of off-the-job course and examination fees up to \$4,000 per trainee, as well as case management services rendered by registered social workers.

5.24 Employers providing on-the-job training under YETP are entitled to a training allowance. To encourage employers to employ young people and provide them with on-the-job training, the training allowance payable to employers who engage young people in on-the-job training for six to 12 months has with effect from June 2013 been increased from \$2,000 to a maximum of \$3,000 per month for each young people engaged. Moreover, to encourage young people to participate in workplace attachment training, the allowance payable to trainees who complete the one-month attachment has with effect from June 2013 been increased from \$2,000 to \$3,000. In addition, to encourage young people to participate in pre-employment training under YETP, the training allowance payable to the trainees who complete the training has with effect from September 2013 been increased from \$30 to \$50 per training day.

- 5.25** In the 2012/13 programme year running from September 2012 to August 2013, 3 824 young people attended pre-employment training and 2 758 trainees were placed into training vacancies under YETP. In addition, 562 trainees found employment in the open market with the assistance of case managers.
- 5.26** YETP also closely collaborates with training bodies to launch well-received special employment projects for industries and individual establishments. These projects include “tailor-made employment projects” and “tailor-made training-cum-employment projects”. The former refers to projects co-organised with establishments offering large number of on-the-job training vacancies while the latter provides pre-employment job skills training custom-made for a particular establishment which is immediately followed by on-the-job training. In the 2012/13 programme year, 61 special employment projects were conducted for employers in the retail, catering, tourism, education, construction and engineering, social services and personal services industries.
- 5.27** In August, we co-organised the Award Ceremony of Most Improved Trainees of YETP cum Concert with Radio 2 of Radio Television Hong Kong. The event named “Solar Project 2013 – Dream Journey with YETP” showcased the creditable improvements of trainees after joining the programme and commended the caring efforts of training bodies and employers. Trainees’ striving experience for improvement constituted the best encouragement to their peers. It was also a sterling testimony to the achievements of trainees, training bodies, employers and the Government in nurturing the development of the younger generation.



Programme for Youths with Acute Employment Difficulties

5.28 To strengthen the employment support for vulnerable youths, LD in July 2010 launched a special employment project, "Action S5", targeting young people aged 15 to 24 with acute employment difficulties. Under this project, non-governmental organisations are commissioned to nominate vulnerable youths and provide on-the-job training opportunities to them for 12 months. Through intensive and customised training and employment support, the project aims at nurturing the work knowledge and skills of participants for their personal and career development. There were 109, 144 and 83 trainees enrolled in the first three phases of the project respectively. On-the-job training of the third phase was completed at the end of 2013.

Youth Employment Support

5.29 LD operates two youth employment resource centres named Youth Employment Start (Y.E.S.). The two centres provide personalised advisory and support services on employment and self-employment to young people aged between 15 and 29 to facilitate them to map out their career path, enhance their employability and support them to pursue self-employment. Services provided include career assessment, career guidance, professional counselling, value-adding training, self-employment support as well as up-to-date labour market information. In 2013, the two centres provided services to 74 850 young people.

Working Holiday Scheme (WHS)

5.30 The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has since 2001 established bilateral WHS with a number of economies to provide an opportunity for our youths to gain living experience overseas for broadening their horizons, and for youths of our partners to learn more about Hong Kong. As of end-2013, HKSAR Government has established bilateral WHS arrangements with a total of nine economies, namely New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Germany, Japan, Canada, Korea, France and the United Kingdom (UK).

5.31 Youths aged 18 to 30 may join the schemes. Save for the UK which allows our youths to stay there for up to 24 months, our partners issue working holiday visas to eligible Hong Kong youths to stay in their economies for up to 12 months. During their stay, the youths can take up short-term employment to subsidise their expenses or attend short-term courses (except for Ireland).

5.32 These WHSs have been well received. As of end-2013, close to 46 000 Hong Kong youths joined the schemes. LD will continue to explore with potential economies to establish new WHS and seek to expand our existing bilateral arrangements.

Regulating Local Employment Agencies and Employment Outside Hong Kong

5.33 We monitor the operation of employment agencies through licensing, inspection and investigation of complaints. In 2013, we issued 2 718 employment agency licences and revoked/refused to renew four. As at end of 2013, there were 2 570 licensed employment agencies in Hong Kong. A total of 1 341 inspections were made to employment agencies in the year.

5.34 We regulate employment outside the territory to safeguard the interests of local employees engaged by employers outside Hong Kong to work in other territories by attesting all employment contracts entered into in Hong Kong involving manual employees and non-manual employees with monthly wages not exceeding \$20,000.

Regulating Labour Importation

Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS)

5.35 To cater for the genuine needs of employers, LD administers SLS that allows the entry of imported workers to take up jobs at technician level or below which cannot be filled locally. SLS operates on the principles of ensuring the priority of local workers in employment while allowing employers with proven local recruitment difficulties to import labour.

5.36 We provide active job matching and referral services for local job seekers to ensure their employment priority. Vacancies under SLS are widely publicised. Local workers can attend tailor-made retraining courses, if appropriate, to better equip themselves to fill the vacancies. Applications from employers who have set restrictive and unreasonable job requirements or who have no sincerity in employing local workers will be rejected.

5.37 As at the end of 2013, there were 2 976 imported workers working in Hong Kong under SLS.

Policy on Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs)

- 5.38** FDHs have been admitted to work in Hong Kong since the 1970's. Apart from enjoying the same statutory rights and benefits as all employees in Hong Kong, FDHs are further protected by a written Standard Employment Contract, which prescribes that the employer has to provide to the FDH free accommodation with reasonable privacy, free food (or food allowance in lieu), free passage to and from the FDH's place of origin and free medical treatment, etc. Furthermore, the Government has since the 1970s prescribed a Minimum Allowable Wage for FDHs as an additional safeguard against exploitation. The Government attaches great importance to safeguarding their statutory and contractual rights. We spare no efforts in investigating the suspected offence cases and prosecution action will be taken out if there is sufficient evidence. In the year, LD widely publicised the rights and benefits of FDHs by, for instance, staging four information kiosks for FDHs at places they frequently gathered in different months. The activities attracted over 24 000 visitors. LD also maintains close liaison with consulates of the FDH-exporting countries, non-governmental organisations serving FDHs and FDH employer groups to deal with issues relating to importation of FDHs.
- 5.39** As at the end of 2013, there were 320 988 FDHs in Hong Kong, an increase of 2.8 per cent compared with 312 395 in 2012. About 51 per cent of the FDHs in Hong Kong were from the Philippines and 46 per cent from Indonesia.