

LCQ2: Employment Support Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

Last month, the Government announced the extension of the coverage of the Employment Support Scheme (ESS) to include, among others, those mature employees (i.e. aged 65 or above) for whom their employers have made voluntary Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) contributions. However, those self-employed persons (except persons in particular trades) and those mature employees who do not have an MPF account, as well as those mature employees with an MPF account but their employers have not made voluntary contributions for them, are all not covered by the Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of self-employed persons and mature employees who currently do not have an MPF account, and the number of mature employees with an MPF account for whom their employers have not made voluntary contributions; whether it has assessed the impacts of ESS not covering such self-employed persons and mature employees on their employment outlook and on the employers of such mature employees;

(2) whether it will roll out other measures, such as providing allowances for the employers of those mature employees who are not covered by ESS through relaxing the eligibility requirements of the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, or accepting certificates issued by certified public accountants (practising) as proof of employment of mature employees to replace the requirement for such employees to hold an MPF account, so as to facilitate the employers concerned to apply for the wage subsidies under ESS; and

(3) whether it has studied launching other relief measures to help those self-employed persons who do not have an MPF account; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant policy bureaux and departments, my consolidated response to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) According to the General Household Survey (GHS) conducted by the Census and Statistics Department during December 2019 to February 2020, it is estimated that there are currently about 207 000 self-employed persons (SEPs), i.e. persons who work for profit or fees in their own business/profession, neither employed by someone nor employing others. On the other hand, according to the information provided by the Mandatory

Provident Fund Schemes Authority (MPFA), there are about 215 000 persons holding SEP Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) account. It should be noted that, for an employer who is a sole proprietor or a partnership and employing others concurrently, he/she is also eligible for opening an SEP MPF account. In this regard, the number of persons having SEP MPF accounts and the number of SEP as reflected in the GHS are not directly comparable. We do not have figure on the number of SEP who have not set up MPF accounts.

As regards mature employees, the above-mentioned GHS estimates that there are currently about 115 000 employees aged 65 or above, whereas the information provided by the MPFA suggests that there are about 60 000 employees aged 65 or above who have set up MPF accounts. Under the Employment Support Scheme (ESS), an employer is eligible to apply for wage subsidies in respect of his/her employees aged 65 or above who have MPF accounts, even if the employer has not made any MPF voluntary contributions for them. If the employer has provided to the MPF trustee(s) information on the basic salaries of employees aged 65 or above, the amount of wage subsidies will be calculated based on 50 per cent of the basic salaries actually paid to the relevant employees in the "specified month", with a wage cap at \$18,000 per month per employee. The maximum wage subsidy per employee is \$9,000 per month. We currently do not have figure on the number of employees aged 65 or above who have MPF accounts but their employers have not made MPF voluntary contributions for them.

Apart from the 60 000 employees aged 65 or above covered by the ESS, together with around 40 000 employees aged 65 or above under the various sector schemes covering land transportation (i.e. taxi, Red minibuses, Green minibuses and local ferries), laundry, catering and construction sectors which have been, or will be launched under the two rounds of Anti-epidemic Fund, as well as around 10 000 employees aged 65 or above employed by government outsourced contracts whose wages are not affected by the epidemic, the various measures as referred above will altogether cover more than 110 000 employees aged 65 or above.

Regarding self-employed persons who do not currently have an MPF account, the relevant bureaux have rolled out financial support for various trades, such as providing a one-off grant of \$7,500 for instructors and coaches of interest classes provided in schools and subvented welfare service units, and active sports coaches registered under National Sports Associations or recognised sports organisations.

(2) The Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM) implemented by the Labour Department (LD) aims to encourage, through the provision of on-the-job training (OJT) allowance, employers who still have doubts over employing the elderly and middle-aged in hiring these unemployed job seekers and providing them with OJT so as to help them settle down in their jobs as soon as possible and acquire the required work skills. LD will enhance EPEM in the second half of 2020 by raising the amount of OJT allowance payable to employers so as to further encourage them to hire the elderly and middle-aged. At the same time, LD will, on a pilot basis, provide a retention allowance to the elderly aged 60 or above who have participated in EPEM so as to encourage them to undergo and complete OJT,

thereby stabilising employment.

The Government aims to introduce bold and prompt measures to provide subsidies to employers as soon as possible so that they can pay employees' wages and thereby retaining jobs for employees. In order to assist employers and employees as soon as practicable, we have to implement the ESS in the simplest and fastest manner. The MPF schemes cover 270 000 employers who have been making MPF contributions or have set up Occupational Retirement Schemes Ordinance Schemes for more than 1.77 million employees, as well as about 215 000 SEPs who have MPF accounts. Hence, we have decided to implement the ESS through the MPF system.

In order to provide timely assistance to large number of employers and employees within the shortest period of time, the administrative arrangement for the ESS must be simple. Hence, we are calculating the wage subsidy amount based on the certificates on the relevant MPF records issued by MPF trustees. Detailed vetting of other information provided by individual applicants, for instance, proof of employment of individual employees provided by employers, would involve highly complex vetting procedures. This would render the Government unable to disburse wage subsidies to employers within three to four weeks upon receipt of applications.

(3) The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) launched the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" ("Special Scheme") in October last year, expected to provide 10 000 employees affected by economic downturn with comprehensive training to upgrade their skills and pursue self-enhancement, with a view to rejoining the employment market as soon as possible. The Special Scheme imposes no restriction on the trade or educational attainment of trainees, nor upper limit to the age of trainees. Elderly persons aged 65 or above may, according to their career aspirations and training needs, enrol in the nearly 70 courses currently provided under the Special Scheme or the about 700 training courses regularly provided by ERB. ERB will launch the enhanced new tranche of the Special Scheme in July 2020, providing quotas for another 10 000 employees. The maximum amount of monthly allowance payable to each trainee during the training period has also been increased from \$4,000 to \$5,800 from May 25, 2020.

Having considered the unprecedented challenges posed by coronavirus disease 2019 in Hong Kong, the Chief Executive announced on April 8, 2020 the second round of anti-epidemic measures including the provision of a time-limited unemployment support scheme through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) system, with a view to providing timely and basic assistance to the unemployed during this difficult time. The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the related funding on April 18. The Social Welfare Department has temporarily relaxed the CSSA asset limits for able-bodied persons (including able-bodied adult singletons and able-bodied adults and children under family cases) by 100 per cent for six months (from June 1 to November 30, i.e. the asset limits will revert to the normal level on December 1). Separately, under the existing CSSA arrangement, the value of an owner-occupied residential property of households with able-bodied persons will be disregarded for a grace period of the first 12 months. This arrangement will also apply to applicants under the six-month

unemployment support scheme.

LCQ3: Insurance for taxis

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

Some taxi owners have relayed that recently, the comprehensive insurance premiums and third party risks insurance premiums for taxis have increased by 35 per cent and 20 per cent respectively when compared with the same period last year. Besides, insurance companies have charged additional premiums of 15 per cent to 25 per cent for taxis with high vehicle age and those driven by elderly drivers, and have substantially increased the amounts specified in insurance contracts to be paid by insured persons for contributing towards insurance compensation (commonly known as "insurance excess"). In addition, some insurance companies have refused to underwrite insurance for taxis reaching the vehicle age of 20, and some insurance companies have recently ceased to underwrite insurance for taxis, thereby lessening competition in the market. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of taxis in Hong Kong as at December 31 last year; the number of taxis which received annual examination last year, with a tabulated breakdown by results and vehicle age (i.e. 13 years and below, each of the years from 14 to 19, and 20 years and above); if there were taxis which failed to pass the annual examination, of the reasons for that;
- (2) whether insurance companies have breached any law or regulation by refusing to underwrite insurance for taxis reaching the vehicle age of 20; of the measures in place to ensure that there will be insurance companies that are willing to underwrite insurance for such taxis; and
- (3) as some insurance companies have pointed out that the increase in the number of traffic accidents involving taxis is one of the causes for the soaring insurance premiums, whether the Government will encourage (e.g. through subsidising taxi owners to install alarm system and equipment for preventing collision) the taxi trade to make good use of technology to reduce traffic accidents; if so, of the details; if not, the measures in place to reduce traffic accidents involving taxis?

Reply:

President,

The reply by the Transport and Housing Bureau, in consultation with the

Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, to the various parts of the Hon Frankie Yick's question is as follows:

(1) In accordance with the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap 374), all taxis are required to undergo and pass a vehicle examination conducted by the Transport Department (TD) before applying for their first vehicle licence. Thereafter, every taxi, regardless of its vehicle age, must undergo an annual vehicle examination conducted by TD for applying for renewal of its vehicle licence. If a vehicle fails the examination, it has to undergo and pass the re-examination after repair, prior to application for renewal of its vehicle licence such that it can continue to be driven on the road.

As at December 31, 2019, there were a total of 18 132 licensed taxis in Hong Kong. In 2019, a total of 17 208 taxis underwent the annual vehicle examinations conducted by TD and all those taxis passed the examinations. A breakdown of the numbers of annual vehicle examinations of taxis by vehicle age is at Annex. As regards the remaining approximately 1 000 taxis, they were first registered in 2019, accounting for less than 10 per cent of all licensed taxis. The situation was similar to that in the previous three years. First registered taxis are also required to pass the vehicle examination conducted by TD and be covered by valid third party risks insurance before they can be driven on the road.

(2) According to the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third Party Risks) Ordinance (Cap 272), it shall not be lawful for any person to use, or to cause or permit any other person to use, a motor vehicle on a road unless the vehicle concerned is covered by valid third party risks insurance. Such insurance policy is a private contract between the policyholder and the insurance company. Insurance companies determine the level of premiums and make the underwriting decision based on commercial principles and factors such as the operating environment, risks assessment and claim records. As far as the comprehensive insurance and third party risks insurance of taxis are concerned, the Insurance Authority notes that there are insurance companies in the market that are willing to underwrite taxis with vehicle age of 20 years or above.

The Government understands that the prevailing economic environment, especially the COVID-19 pandemic has brought severe operating pressure on the transport industry. To assist the trade in tiding over the difficult period, the Government has launched a series of relief measures under the two rounds of the Anti-epidemic Fund. In particular, the Government would provide each registered vehicle owner of taxis a one-off non-accountable subsidy of \$30,000 per vehicle. TD is issuing letters to inform all eligible registered owners of taxis of the detailed registration arrangements for the subsidy through an electronic platform. The deadline for registration is September 30, 2020. TD will disburse the subsidy to the applicant within two to three weeks upon verification of the submitted documents.

(3) In 2017 to 2019, there were 3 837, 3 916 and 4 198 traffic accidents involving taxis respectively. The contributory factors of these accidents are mostly driver-related, including driving inattentively, driving too close to vehicle in front and losing control of vehicles.

In recent years, the Government has been actively promoting "Smart Mobility", and has planned to launch a \$1 billion Smart Traffic Fund in 2020-21 to provide funding support for research and application of vehicle-related innovation and technology. In addition, the Government is open-minded about any innovation and technologies that could effectively improve road and driving safety, and welcomes the introduction of new driver assistance systems by vehicle manufacturers for various classes of vehicles in this regard. It is noted that in recent years, a number of vehicle manufacturers have installed driver assistance systems, such as Collision Prevention Assist, Lane Keep Assist and Blind Spot Assist alerts, Stability Programme and Automatic Emergency Braking System, etc, on their vehicles. After assessing the technical details submitted by vehicle manufacturers in support of their applications for type approval, TD has already approved the installation of some of the above-mentioned systems on relevant vehicles registered in Hong Kong. Vehicle manufacturers may also consider introducing such systems to taxis with a view to enhancing driving safety.

Indeed, the Government has all along attached great importance to safe driving among taxi drivers and disseminates relevant messages through publicity and education programmes. For instance, TD has organised the Safe Driving and Health Campaign to arouse drivers' awareness of safe driving and their own health conditions. The Road Safety Council also conducts promotional campaigns with the theme of "driving attentively", to urge drivers to stay focused when driving.

With a view to enhancing the safety and quality of taxi services, starting from October 1 this year, applicants for a full driving licence to drive a taxi must have completed the specified pre-service course and obtained the course certificate before they are issued with such driving licence. The course covers knowledge on driving and road safety, etc, which helps enhance the awareness of safe driving among taxi drivers.

Through the Committee on Taxi Service Quality and regular meetings with the trade, we will continue to maintain close liaison with the trade and look into their needs so as to formulate appropriate measures for improving the trade's operating environment and vehicle safety.

Special visiting arrangement under Emergency Response Level

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) today (June 10) announced that a special visiting arrangement in non-acute hospitals will be implemented beginning next Wednesday (June 17).

The special visiting arrangement will initially cover 16 hospitals (as in appended table). Ward staff will begin contacting patients' family members today for scheduling the visits. Family members are not required to call the wards for booking themselves. Each patient will be allocated a one-hour session by one registered visitor each week, with the arrangement of the hospitals.

The HA spokesperson said, "The HA activated the Emergency Response Level on January 25 to tie in with the infection control measures, and suspended all visiting arrangements.

"With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic around the world, the Emergency Response Level will likely be maintained for a while. Amid easing the situation locally, both the HA Central Command Committee and the HA Central Committee on Infectious Disease and Emergency Responses have deliberated and assessed the infection control risk associated with the visiting arrangement. It was agreed that a special visiting arrangement could be implemented in non-acute hospitals, such as infirmaries and convalescent hospitals.

"Long-stay patients rely more heavily on support from family members both psychologically and in their daily lives. The hospitals and wards concerned have not received any COVID-19 patients, and crowd control measures for visitors are physically viable."

The arrangement will be adjusted with due consideration of the latest epidemic situation, including the progressive extension of the arrangement to other hospitals and wards if the situation allows.

"Visitors entering public hospitals are required to comply with infection control measures, such as wearing surgical masks, temperature checks, and health declarations to safeguard the well-being of patients, staff and visitors.

"We hope the community can understand that visiting arrangements can only be made with certain restrictions under the current epidemic situation. Meanwhile, other acute hospitals and wards will continue to make compassionate arrangements and video-visiting as far as practicable," the spokesperson added.

In addition, the clinical attachment arrangement of medical, nursing, allied health and pharmacy grade students will resume gradually to dovetail with the academic schedules of universities and institutions.

Non-acute hospitals with special visiting arrangements
(Commences on June 17, 2020)

Hong Kong East Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheshire Home, Chung Hom Kok• Wong Chuk Hang Hospital
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Hong Kong West Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Fung Yiu King Hospital • The Duchess of Kent Children's Hospital at Sandy Bay • MacLehose Medical Rehabilitation Centre
Kowloon East Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haven of Hope Hospital
Kowloon Central Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation Building, Kowloon Hospital • Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Wong Tai Sin Hospital • Hong Kong Buddhist Hospital
Kowloon West Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lai King Building, Princess Margaret Hospital • Paediatric Developmental Disabilities Unit, Wai Yee Block, Caritas Medical Centre
New Territories East Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheshire Home, Shatin • Shatin Hospital (except psychiatric wards) • Tai Po Hospital (except psychiatric wards)
New Territories West Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tin Ka Ping Infirmary, Pok Oi Hospital • Siu Lam Hospital

LCQ 15: Professional conduct of members of Moderation Committees

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

One of the questions in Paper 1 of the History subject of this year's Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination requested candidates to make reference to the information provided in the question and then answer whether they agreed to the following statement: "Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-45". There have been public comments that since the invasion of China and atrocities committed by Japan in that period were too numerous to list, causing indelible pain to the country and nation, the statement obviously confounds right and wrong. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has responded that, as in the case of other HKDSE subject examinations, a moderation committee (MC) is responsible for setting questions and drafting marking guidelines for the History subject. The MC of the History subject comprises a chief examiner, a setter or co-setters, moderators and an assessment development manager of HKEAA. It has been reported that the manager concerned has repeatedly made biased remarks on social media. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if HKEAA will initiate an investigation into the aforesaid incident, including whether any MC member has, having been affected by his or her personal political stance, set questions which confound right

and wrong; if HKEAA will, of the relevant mechanisms for investigation and penalty;

(2) of the measures put in place by the Education Bureau (EDB) to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, and whether the EDB will make improvement recommendations on the composition and operation of MCs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows the number of MC members punished in the past five years for having violated the established mechanism or codes of professional conduct, and the details of the punishments; whether HKEAA will never appoint such persons as MC members again?

Reply:

President,

Question 2(c) of History Paper 1 of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination this year has aroused great controversy in society. When there are problems in the implementation of curriculum and assessment, especially those involving education and examination and assessment organisations, the Education Bureau (EDB) has the responsibility to safeguard the education profession, take corresponding rectifying actions in the interests of students and the public, as well as address the public concern. The EDB has already explained the relevant reasoning in its statement dated May 14, at the press conference on May 15 and in the paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Education on May 25. Currently, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) takes full responsibility for the work of the Moderation Committee (MC). The EDB has no knowledge of the relevant duties (including the list of members) as they are confidential. The EDB has referred Parts (1) and (3) of the question which involve confidential information on MC to the HKEAA. The related information is consolidated as follows:

(1) The EDB has asked the HKEAA to conduct an internal investigation on why there was the problematic History examination question in the HKDSE Examination this year. According to the existing information provided by the HKEAA, regardless of their background and personal belief, MC members have to comply with the HKEAA's established procedures and follow the curriculum and assessment requirements when setting examination questions to ensure that candidates are assessed by the examination papers in an effective and fair manner. MC will set questions and marking guidelines in accordance with the subject's Curriculum and Assessment Guide and Assessment Framework. The HKEAA has mechanisms in place for checking and proofreading the contents of examination papers at various stages of question setting to ensure the quality of examination questions.

Concerning the controversies caused by recent media's disclosure of messages posted by HKEAA staff in their personal social media accounts, the HKEAA reiterates that employees are bound by the HKEAA's relevant regulations, procedures, rules and policies when performing their duties. The HKEAA has a mechanism to follow up staff discipline issues. It will follow up

the incident fairly and impartially having regard to the relevant facts, and its Employee Code of Conduct and regulations. An employee who is found to have committed negligence when performing his duties or compromised professional ethics, integrity and professionalism will be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with the gravity of the case and the responsibility to be borne. For the sake of procedural justice, the HKEAA will not make further comment at this stage.

(2) In view of the grave public concern over the History examination question in the HKDSE Examination, the EDB will assign a team of officers who are familiar with the curriculum and quality assurance to the HKEAA to study the question setting, vetting and approval mechanism under the HKDSE Examination and whether the mechanism has been strictly complied with in the process of question setting and question moderation of the History examination paper this year. In addition to the EDB officers, members of the education sector and representatives of the HKEAA will also participate in the review. The EDB will also review the existing mechanism and fulfil its monitoring role in the HKDSE Examination, with a view to ensuring the sustained quality of the HKDSE Examination and examination questions. Upon completion of the review, the task force will recommend follow up actions and improvement measures.

(3) According to the information provided by the HKEAA, no MC member was penalised in the last five years for violation of the established mechanism or codes of professional conduct.

EMSD announces test results of LPG quality in May 2020

â€‹The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) today (June 10) announced that the department collected eight liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) samples from auto-LPG filling stations and LPG terminals on a random basis in May 2020 for laboratory tests. The results show that the LPG quality of all these samples complied with auto-LPG specifications.

The detailed test results are available on the EMSD's website (www.emsd.gov.hk/en/rl/lpg_sample_analysis_simple). Enquiries can also be made to the EMSD's hotline on 2333 3762.

In addition, the EMSD has been vetting independent third-party test reports submitted by LPG supply companies for each shipment to ensure that the quality of imported LPG complies with the specified requirements.