

Employment Support Scheme publishes seventh batch of employers receiving wage subsidies and disburses another batch of subsidies

The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) Secretariat published on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) today (August 11) the name list of the seventh batch of employers that have received wage subsidies under the first tranche, the amount of subsidies received and the employers' committed headcount of paid employees.

A Government spokesman said, "The name list of the seventh batch of employers published today covers about 16 900 employers. These employers have received wage subsidies totalling about \$6.23 billion (for June to August 2020), and committed to maintaining a total paid headcount of about 277 000. Together with the published name lists of the first six batches of employers, the Secretariat has published from June 22 up to today the name lists of seven batches covering about 137 500 employers that have received wage subsidies and the relevant information."

In addition, the ESS Secretariat is arranging disbursement of wage subsidies totalling about \$2.6 billion to a further batch of about 7 500 successful employer applicants with a total committed paid headcount of about 116 000 employees. To date, the wage subsidies disbursed amount to about \$43.2 billion, covering nearly 146 100 employers with a total committed paid headcount of about 1.87 million.

Excluding the 18 000 ineligible applicants that have not been approved for wage subsidies, the ESS Secretariat has completed processing for around 97 per cent of the eligible employers, and will continue to process the remaining 4 500 applications with a view to completing the first tranche as early as possible. Preparations are under way for the second tranche and the details will be announced in due course.

The spokesman said, "Appropriate monitoring mechanisms have been put in place under the ESS, and the name lists of employers that have received wage subsidies and related information are uploaded to the ESS website in a timely manner. Should an employer be found to have abused or violated the conditions of the ESS, the employees concerned or members of the public can make a report to the ESS Secretariat. The Secretariat and the processing agent will follow up on all reports and complaints."

From June 22, when the ESS Secretariat first published the name lists of employers that have received wage subsidies, up to August 10, a total of 346 reports have been received. The cases involve primarily allegations of unreasonable staff reductions and/or dismissal of employees, late payment of wages or pay cuts, company closure or change of operator. The Secretariat and

the processing agent are following up on the reports and the Review Panel set up by the Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office will examine the investigation report on each of the cases. The Secretariat will inform the informants of the results after completing investigation.

If an employer is found, after investigation, to have made a false statement, misinterpreted or concealed the facts, or furnished false or misleading documents or information in an attempt to deceive the Government, the Secretariat and/or the processing agent to obtain any subsidies under the ESS, the employer may be prosecuted. If necessary, the Secretariat will pass the case to relevant enforcement departments for follow-up action. Should there be complaints relating to provisions under the Employment Ordinance or labour disputes arising from conditions of employment, such as unreasonable dismissal, withholding wage payment or unreasonable pay cuts, the Secretariat will refer the cases to the Labour Department. The Secretariat has so far referred 31 reports or complaints to the Labour Department and one case to the Customs and Excise Department. It has also referred two reports of defaulting on mandatory provident fund contributions to the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority for follow up action.

The Secretariat will disburse the \$7,500 one-off lump sum subsidy to 3 800 Self-employed Persons (SEPs) involving a total subsidy of \$28.5 million. Taking into account the latest approvals, about 99 300 SEPs have received the one-off lump sum subsidy, totalling about \$740 million.