

LCQ20: Employment support for persons with disabilities

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (July 7):

Question:

Some non-governmental organisations have pointed out that persons with disabilities (PWDs) have faced employment difficulties over the years, and the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic has aggravated the problem. For example, under the impacts of the epidemic and the Government's directive to suspend the operation of massage establishments, there has been, since early last year, a significant reduction in the work for and income of quite a number of blind persons working as masseurs, but it is difficult for them to switch to other industries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of PWDs who were employed, (ii) the number of PWDs who were underemployed and (iii) the unemployment rate of PWDs, in each of the past three years;

(2) of the following information on the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) in each of the past three years and since January 2021: (i) the number of placements recorded (with a breakdown by type of disability of the persons placed into employment, and the industry and type of work in which they are/were engaged), (ii) the number of participating employers, and (iii) the average amount of allowance granted for each placement;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications for retention allowance, which were submitted by PWDs placed into employment under WOPS, received and approved by the Labour Department (LD) since September 2020, and the average amount of allowance granted for each approved application; whether the LD has reviewed the effectiveness of the disbursement of a retention allowance in encouraging PWDs to undergo and complete on-the-job training; if so, of the details;

(4) whether, among the 30 000 time-limited jobs created in the public and private sectors by the Government with funds allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund, there are jobs created specifically for PWDs; if so, of a breakdown of the numbers of (i) such jobs and (ii) the PWDs employed, by type of disability of the persons suitable for taking up such jobs and type of work to which the jobs belong;

(5) whether it knows if the Love Upgrading Special Scheme implemented by the Employees Retraining Board has provided courses designed specifically for PWDs; if so, of the following information on such courses under each tranche:

(i) the number of courses, (ii) the number of enrolments, (iii) the number of trainees who completed the courses and (iv) the average amount of special allowance disbursed to each trainee who has completed any of the courses;

(6) whether the Government has put in place other measures to assist PWDs who are unemployed or underemployed amid the epidemic; if so, of the details; and

(7) of the measures in place to solve the problem of employment difficulties of PWDs in the long run?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureau and departments, our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Member is set out below:

(1) Data collection of the 2019/20 round of the Survey on Persons with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases, conducted by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), has been completed. The data collected are being processed and analysed. The survey results, including the employment situation of persons with disabilities, are expected to be released by around end of 2021.

The C&SD conducts the survey once every six to seven years. According to the last survey conducted in the whole year of 2013, it was estimated that some 76 200 persons aged 15 and above with disabilities were employed and the unemployment rate of this group of persons was six per cent. Constrained by the sample size, the corresponding number of underemployed persons is not available from the survey.

(2) In 2018, 2019 and 2020, and from January to May 2021, there were respectively 796, 942, 809 and 438 placements recorded under the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS). Breakdowns of these placements by type of disabilities of the persons placed into employment, and the industry and type of work in which they were engaged are provided at the Annex.

Over the same period, there were respectively 379, 395, 294 and 197 establishments participated in the WOPS to engage persons with disabilities, and the average amounts of allowance granted for each placement were \$13,593, \$15,776, \$24,301 and \$23,327 respectively.

(3) The LD launched a pilot scheme in September 2020 to encourage persons with disabilities engaged through LD's referral to undergo and complete on-the-job training through the provision of a retention allowance, thereby stabilising employment. As at end May 2021, the LD had received 233 applications for retention allowance from persons with disabilities and approved a total of 220 cases. The average amount of retention allowance granted for each case was \$4,752. As the scheme had only been implemented for a short period and the on-the-job training of a significant proportion of the cases had yet to be completed, it would be premature to assess the effectiveness of the scheme.

(4) To relieve the worsening unemployment situation due to the epidemic and the anti-epidemic measures, the Government has earmarked \$6.6 billion under the Anti-epidemic Fund last year to create around 30 000 time-limited jobs, normally last up to 12 months, in the public and private sectors within two years. Since the implementation of the Job Creation Scheme in April last year, around 31 000 jobs have been created, with half of the jobs being created in the Government and the other half in the non-governmental sector. Under the Job Creation Scheme, we do not set an upper or lower limit for employing persons with disabilities, the Government also does not collect relevant information about the persons with disabilities employed under the Scheme. With regard to jobs created in the Government, it is all along our policy to ensure that persons with disabilities, like other applicants, enjoy equal opportunities in applying for government jobs by putting in place appropriate measures to facilitate their participation in the recruitment process, and set up a preferential system in their appointment.

(5) The Employees Retraining Board launched three tranches of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme (Special Scheme) from October 2019 to support employees affected by economic downturn. All three tranches of the Special Scheme provide dedicated courses for persons with disabilities and persons recovered from work injuries, with the number gradually increased to 41. As at end May 2021, a total of 166 trainees enrolled in 177 dedicated courses (note: a trainee may enrol in more than one course) and completed 165 dedicated courses under the three tranches of the Special Scheme. The amount of special allowance disbursed to trainees who had completed the courses was about \$2,400 per trainee on average (note: including full-time and part-time courses). The fourth tranche of the Special Scheme has just commenced this month, providing 43 dedicated courses.

(6) and (7) The Selective Placement Division (SPD) of the LD provides job seekers with disabilities fit for open employment with personalised employment services to help them get employed. The employment consultants of the SPD conduct in-depth interviews to learn about the qualifications, skills, experience, career preferences, etc. of individual job seekers with disabilities in order to provide them with employment counselling to help them understand their work capabilities and market demands. The employment consultants also proactively conduct job matching and identify suitable job vacancies for job seekers with disabilities and refer them to employers for job interviews. Upon placing job seekers with disabilities into employment, the employment consultants will provide follow-up service for not less than six months to assist them with settling in to their new jobs. The employment consultants will also provide support for employers to help them understand the special needs of employees with disabilities and assist both parties in building up a good working relationship. The LD has also engaged a welfare organisation to offer professional psychological and emotional counselling to needy job seekers with disabilities registered with the SPD so as to help them concentrate on job search and settle into their new jobs, thereby realising their potential in employment.

The LD implements the WOPS to encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities through the provision of financial incentives. Eligible

employers who hire persons with disabilities through the LD under the WOPS and provide appropriate on-the-job training and support as well as appoint mentors for such employees will be granted an allowance. In the light of the unemployment situation in 2020, the LD raised the ceiling of on-the-job training allowance in September 2020 to further encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities. The maximum allowance payable to employers who hire a job seeker with disabilities having employment difficulties has been increased by \$9,000 to a total of \$60,000 within the nine-month allowance period.

The LD also launched a pilot scheme in September 2020 which provides a retention allowance to encourage persons with disabilities to deal with job challenges, accumulate experience gradually, grasp job skills and increase self-confidence, thereby pursuing stable employment. Under the scheme, a person with disabilities employed through LD's referral will be offered a retention allowance of \$3,000 if he/she stays in the job for three months. Thereafter, this employee will receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 for each ensuing month he/she stays in the job. The maximum allowance period is nine months.

The LD will also continue to promote the employment of persons with disabilities through publicity as well as active liaison with employers from different sectors to enhance their understanding of the capabilities of persons with disabilities and encourage them to provide more suitable job vacancies for persons with disabilities.

The Government's objective of promoting the employment of persons with disabilities is to facilitate them to contribute to the society at different jobs based on their abilities (rather than disabilities). In this respect, the Government is committed to implementing various measures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. Apart from LD's services, the Government also subsidises non-governmental organisations to provide vocational rehabilitation and training for persons with disabilities; provide job matching services in the open market; provide allowances to encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities; set up social enterprises for creating more job opportunities and on-the-job training for persons with disabilities, etc.