

Freezing of income limit and raising of asset limit of Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme

The Government announced today (January 30) that the income limit of the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (I-WITS) Scheme will be frozen at \$11,000 per month. Meanwhile, the scheme's asset limit will be raised from \$96,000 to \$99,000 according to the established adjustment mechanism. The new asset limit will be applicable to applications for subsidy from February 2020 onwards. Details are at the Annex.

Following the established adjustment mechanism of the I-WITS Scheme, the income limit would need to be reduced in tandem with the year-on-year change in the median monthly domestic household income of a one-person household as at the third quarter of 2019. However, having considered factors including the prevailing economic situation and after consulting the Legislative Council, the Government will freeze the income limit of the I-WITS Scheme in the 2020 annual adjustment as a one-off special arrangement.

For enquiries about the income and asset limits of the I-WITS Scheme, applicants may call the 24-hour hotline (2558 3000) of the Working Family Allowance Office (WFAO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency, visit the WFAO's enquiry counters at 9/F, 181 Hoi Bun Road, Kwun Tong, or visit the website of the WFAO (www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/wfao).

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, January 30, 2020 is 106.7 (up 0.3 against yesterday's index).

Asset limits under CSSA and SSA

Schemes to be adjusted upwards in February according to established adjustment mechanism

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) announced today (January 30) that the asset limits under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme will be adjusted upwards next month (February) according to the established adjustment mechanism.

An SWD spokesman said, "With effect from February 1, the asset limits under the CSSA Scheme and Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) (including OALA under the Guangdong (GD) Scheme and the Fujian (FJ) Scheme) under the SSA Scheme will be adjusted upwards (see Annex) according to the index of prices under the established mechanism."

As for the annual revision of the various amounts under the CSSA and SSA Schemes according to the established mechanism, which include the standard payment rates and maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme, the rates of Old Age Allowance (OAA) (including OAA under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme), OALA (including OALA under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme) and Disability Allowance under the SSA Scheme, as well as the income limits for OALA (including OALA under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme), the spokesman said details will be announced after the relevant adjustment proposals have been approved by the Legislative Council and the adjustments will take retrospective effect from February 1 according to the established mechanism.

Separately, the Chief Executive announced on January 14 the proposal to combine Normal OALA and Higher OALA with the payment level set at the Higher OALA rate (currently at \$3,585 per month). The Chief Executive also announced the proposal to significantly increase the asset limit under the OALA Scheme to \$500,000 for a single elderly person (\$750,000 for a married couple) after standardising the payment rate. The SWD will announce the detailed arrangements and effective date for the relevant measures in due course.

Applicants and recipients of CSSA and SSA may contact their respective social security field units for enquiries, or call the SWD hotline at 2343 2255.

Labour Department encourages foreign

domestic helpers to stay home on their rest day

The Labour Department (LD) today (January 30) appealed to foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) to stay home on their rest day in order to safeguard their personal health and to reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus in the community.

The spokesman said, "The response level under the 'Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance' has been raised to Emergency Response Level with effect from January 25. The public should refrain from gathering so as to minimise the risk of infection. The Government notes that the Philippine and Indonesian Consulates-General have also appealed to their nationals to take necessary health precautions and avoid large crowds or gatherings."

"The Government appeals to FDHs to stay home for rest on their rest day as far as possible, and to stay away from crowds on public transport or at public places. At the same time, employers must not require FDHs to work on their rest day. If it is necessary for FDHs to go out, they are advised to wear a surgical mask and to avoid staying in crowded places. If a FDH or his/her employer has visited the Mainland recently, he/she should wear a surgical mask and stay home for 14 days upon return to Hong Kong as far as possible," the spokesman continued.

LD appeals to employers to explain the special circumstances in discussing rest day arrangements with their FDHs and calls for mutual understanding. In particular, LD reminds that an employer who compels his/her FDH to work on a rest day is in breach of the Employment Ordinance and is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, to a maximum fine of \$50,000.

For further health advice on the prevention of pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, please visit the website of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH) (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/102465.html) or call the DH's hotline (2125 1122). Information in Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, Hindi, Nepali and Urdu are also available at www.chp.gov.hk/en/other/submenu/424/index.html.

For enquiry on employment rights and benefits, please call the LD's 24-hour enquiry hotline at 2717 1771 (the hotline is manned by "1823"). Employers may also make reference to the press release on LD's appeal to employers to make arrangement to reduce the risk of the spread of novel coronavirus in the community (www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202001/30/P2020013000285.htm).

Government launches enhanced Technology Talent Admission Scheme

â€‹The Innovation and Technology Commission today (January 30) launched the enhancement measures of the Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS) as announced in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address. Eligible companies are welcome to apply for the enhanced scheme.

When it was launched, TechTAS covered tenants and incubatees of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited which conducted research and development (R&D) activities in seven technology areas, i.e. artificial intelligence, biotechnology, cybersecurity, data analytics, financial technologies, material science and robotics. With the enhancements, TechTAS now covers six new technology areas, namely 5G communications, digital entertainment, green technology, integrated circuit design, the Internet of Things and microelectronics, and its coverage is extended to all companies conducting R&D activities in the aforementioned 13 technology areas in Hong Kong.

The enhancements of TechTAS will allow more companies to benefit from the certainty and streamlined procedures offered by the scheme, thus expediting the admission of technology talent from different parts of the world to undertake R&D work in Hong Kong, encouraging cross-fertilisation of local and non-local talent and contributing to Hong Kong's innovation and technology development.

Launched in June 2018, TechTAS provides a fast-track arrangement for admitting overseas and Mainland technology talent. Successful companies will be given quotas for bringing in such people for undertaking R&D work. More information is available on the TechTAS website (techtas.itc.gov.hk). For enquiries, please contact the Innovation and Technology Commission (Email: techtas@itc.gov.hk).