

LCQ15: Employment market

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (March 17):

Question:

It has been reported that while quite a number of enterprises have frozen or reduced their headcount because they have been affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, certain information technology-related industries have been unable to recruit adequate manpower to take up newly created posts. Such a situation reflects that there is a mismatch in the employment market. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed the short-term and long-term impacts of the epidemic on the local employment market; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it will improve its work on the projection of manpower supply and requirements, including conducting projections more frequently and taking into consideration short-term political and economic factors, so as to enhance the accuracy of projection findings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it has enhanced the communication with representatives of the industrial and commercial sectors, so as to grasp the market demand for talents who have received education on subjects related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), as well as allocate additional resources to tertiary institutions for offering more STEM-related courses and places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will introduce more facilitation measures to attract innovation and technology talents to come to Hong Kong for career development, so as to meet the market demand for such talents and build a talent pool; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB), the Education Bureau (EDB), the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) and the Office of the Government Economist, our consolidated reply to Member's question is set out below:

- (1) The COVID-19 epidemic has significant impact on the economy and labour market in 2020. According to C&SD's statistics, total employment decreased by 5.1 per cent to 3 653 200 in 2020, while the labour force decreased by 2.2 per cent to 3 880 300. In the whole year of 2020, the unemployment rate

averaged 5.9 per cent, an increase of 3.0 percentage points over 2019. Analysed by sector, the epidemic has particularly impacted sectors relating to consumption and tourism (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors). The unemployment rate of these sectors as a whole was 10.0 per cent on average in 2020. The unemployment rates of other major sectors also increased in 2020.

Due to the fourth wave of local epidemic, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) increased by 0.2 percentage point over the fourth quarter of 2020 to 6.5 per cent in November 2020 – January 2021, and after seasonal adjustment it increased by 0.4 percentage point to 7.0 per cent. The unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) of sectors relating to consumption and tourism as a whole increased to 11.3 per cent.

It is anticipated that the labour market would remain under pressure in the short term. If the epidemic is brought under control with the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the labour market may gradually recover in the second half of 2021. In the longer run, changes in consumption behaviours or business models caused by the COVID-19 epidemic may affect the local labour market. The epidemic may expedite adoption of innovation and technology (I&T) in daily lives and business operations, such as online shopping, remote work and distance business, which may lead to changes in demand for talents for different jobs. The Government will monitor relevant developments closely and provide additional support and assistance as necessary, including enhancements in training, re-training, and job-matching.

(2) The Government's labour force projections and manpower projections focus mainly on the medium to long-term trends of the Hong Kong labour force; short-term fluctuations in individual years that may not constitute a trend will affect the projection results. The Government will closely monitor the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on supply and requirements of the labour force and update the projections where needed.

(3) The Government has been maintaining dialogue with post-secondary education institutions and providing information on manpower trends of different industries to facilitate planning by the institutions. In addition, through the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors, the Government encourages the self-financing post-secondary education sector to offer designated programmes in disciplines including architecture and engineering, computer science and financial technology to nurture talent in support of specific industries with keen demand for talents. In the 2020/21 academic year, there are more than 36 000 student enrolments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related programmes funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), an increase of 11 per cent over five years. As regards vocational and professional training and education, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has signed Memoranda of Understanding with over 20 local major enterprises and institutions under the Industry Partner Collaboration Scheme in recent years. Through this platform, VTC has undertaken a number of inter-disciplinary collaborative projects with industry partners, and invited industry veterans to serve as STEM ambassadors to share their extensive industry knowledge and latest updates on technological development with students to enhance their knowledge on

relevant industries and nurture more professionals. In addition, VTC will review relevant programmes from time to time, taking into account various factors including social situation, industry needs and resource availability.

(4) In addition to further enhancing the local I&T ecosystem and helping overseas talent recognise the full range of opportunities offered by Hong Kong, as well as the continuous implementation of the Technology Talent Admission Scheme, the Government will launch the Global STEM Professorship Scheme to strengthen our support for the universities to attract world-renowned I&T scholars as well as their teams to work in Hong Kong, thereby enabling local universities to strengthen their STEM teaching and research. Subject to nominations by UGC-funded universities and endorsement by the Assessment Panel, each overseas STEM scholar relocating to Hong Kong will receive subsidy for up to five years. Up to 100 professorships can be awarded. Up to four members of the research teams who work for the above scholars can also receive subsidy for up to three years. ITB and EDB are finalising the implementation details. We aim to invite universities to submit nominations to the Assessment Panel within the first half of this year. Moreover, to enlarge the pool of I&T talent in Hong Kong, the Government has recently extended the eligibility of the Research Talent Hub, allowing holders of a bachelor or master degree in a STEM-related discipline awarded by a well-recognised non-local institution to join the Hub.

Rescheduling and refund arrangements of “Italian Baroque – Appreciation Talk with Live Choral Music”

The programme "Italian Baroque – Appreciation Talk with Live Choral Music" presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, originally scheduled for December 2020, has been rescheduled to 7.30pm from April 14 to 28 at the Lecture Hall of the Hong Kong Space Museum. Patrons with original intact ticket(s) (with stubs) may attend the lecture(s) on the same topic(s) in April.

Patrons who cannot attend the rescheduled lecture(s) should take their original intact ticket(s) with stubs to the URBTIX Box Office of Hong Kong Cultural Centre for ticket refunds no later than April 28 (Wednesday). Late applications will not be accepted. For details, please visit ticket.urbtix.hk/internet/en_US/newsDetail/173276.

Tickets for each of the rescheduled talks priced at \$60 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk).

The talks will be hosted by Calvin Lai, while the live music

demonstration will be performed by SingFest Choral Academy featuring Dominic Lam as chorus master. Lai, a broadcaster of RTHK Radio 4, tutor, speaker, and writer, has gained a wealth of experience in presenting classical music and educational programmes to a wide audience. He also honed his skills and served as a technical score advisor for filming classical music performances. Lai is a co-author of a collection of articles about classical music and related stories published in 2007.

The series consists of three talks (conducted in Cantonese). Lai will guide the audience through three topics of vocal music in the Italian Baroque era, from its origin, development and propagation. Details of the lectures are as follows:

April 14 (Wednesday)

Topic: Where it All Started

To trace the origin of Baroque music, the focus is on two epoch-making composers: Claudio Monteverdi, who put new energy into opera as a genre, and Giovanni Gabrieli, who excelled in the use of space and contrast.

April 21 (Wednesday)

Topic: Among Italian City-States

To introduce remarkable composers from various Italian city-states in history, and the characteristics of their works, with a special focus on Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, composer of Stabat Mater. He was a genius of great talent and influence, who unfortunately died at a young age.

April 28 (Wednesday)

Topic: Reaching High and Far

To focus on the propagation and changes of the Italian style in Europe at an earlier time, and how it transformed into the Baroque style.

For telephone credit card bookings, please call 2111 5999. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7321 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/music/programs_1046.html.

LCSD to launch new Cantonese opera talks in April

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) will launch another wave of the "Cantonese Opera Libretti and Scripts – From Texts to Performance" series of talks in April.

A total of five talks will be hosted by veteran Cantonese opera star Sun Kim-long. Acclaimed Cantonese opera performers will share with audiences their experiences of performing and interpreting the libretti of various well

known repertoires by renowned local playwrights. Details are as follows:

7.30pm, April 2 (Friday)

AC1, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Lau Wai-ming

Topic: "Phenomenal New Talents"

3pm, April 3 (Saturday)

AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Leung Wai-hong

Topic: "A Bright and Straight Road Ahead"

3pm, April 4 (Sunday)

AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Lam Tin-yau

Topic: "Overcoming Hardships Has Its Rewards"

3pm, April 5 (Monday)

AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Cheng Wing-mui

Topic: "It Takes Stamina to Weather the Storms"

3pm, April 6 (Tuesday)

AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Wai Chun-fai

Topic: "Riding on the Road to Success"

Sun Kim-long began his apprenticeship under the Cantonese opera master Wu Gongxia and studied martial arts from Xu Junhan. Besides appearing in an extensive number of stage performances, he is also actively involved in producing and promoting Cantonese opera. His works include "Reflection of Beauties in Lotus Pond", and "The Green Jade Hairpin". He was awarded Artist of the Year (Xiqu) at The Hong Kong Arts Development Awards 2018 by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. In 2019, he was awarded a Medal of Honour by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. Sun is currently Vice Chairman of the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong.

"Cantonese Opera Libretti and Scripts – From Texts to Performance" will be conducted in Cantonese and admission is free. Telephone registration is required. Please call 2268 7267 during office hours from 10am tomorrow (March 18) onwards. Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Details can be found on

www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_1055.html. For programme enquiries, please call 2268 7325.

Key statistics on service demand of A&E Departments and occupancy rates in public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

During the winter surge, the Hospital Authority is closely monitoring the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rates in public hospitals. Key service statistics are being issued daily for public information. Details are in the appended table.

Government extends social distancing measures under Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance

The Government will gazette the directions and specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) to maintain the social distancing measures currently in place, and strengthen infection control measures in catering business premises. The directions and specifications will take effect on March 18, 2021 for a period of 14 days till March 31, 2021 (Wednesday) (the specified period).

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "Since the gradual and orderly relaxation of social distancing measures on February 18, the COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong remains volatile. Large-scale cluster outbreaks were found at catering business premises and fitness centres, and silent transmission in the community is still active.

"Taking into account the latest public health risk assessment, there is still no room for further relaxation of measures at this stage. The Government will therefore continue to maintain most of the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business premises and scheduled premises, as well as the requirements for group gatherings and mask wearing for 14 days until March 31.

"Since a patron staying at catering premises may take off his or her mask for most of the time in order to eat or drink, anti-epidemic experts

have been recommending the enhancement of air ventilation in catering premises to a minimum level of six air changes per hour, and if this could not be achieved, appropriate air purifier(s) should be installed as an alternative. The latest requirements would mandate catering business premises to implement the above measures by end April in order to reduce the relevant transmission risks."

"In addition, the relevant departments have been actively discussing with the industry to encourage fitness centres to enhance infection control measures on a voluntary basis. Such measures include limiting the number of customers in the premises and exploring more frequent tests of staff. The Government is thankful to the self-discipline and co-operation by the trade in fighting the virus together."

"The Government announced on March 8 that all staff of scheduled premises under Cap. 599F were included as a vaccination priority group under the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. We call on all staff to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and others. If the vaccination rate of the whole community is satisfactory and that we all continue to strictly follow the anti-epidemic measures, it is believed that the control of the epidemic could be strengthened, thus creating the favourable conditions for relaxing restrictions for restaurants and other premises."

The details of the latest requirements and restrictions (see Annex 1 for requirements and restrictions under Cap. 599F) are as follows:

Catering business

(1) Catering business premises should comply with specified requirements on air change or air purifier(s) by April 30, 2021. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has made appointments to the relevant Working Group, which will advise the Government on the smooth implementation of the above requirement.

(2) The existing requirements and restrictions applicable to catering business will be maintained during the specified period, including:

(a) Dedicated staff must be arranged in catering business premises for clearing used utensils and cleaning and disinfecting used tables and partitions. If this arrangement is not practicable, it must be ensured that the staff carrying out the aforementioned duties must adopt hand hygiene measures before switching to perform other duties, and should adopt hand hygiene measures as necessary during each round of cleaning-up duties. Hand hygiene measures include using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, washing hands or changing gloves.

(b) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business adopts specified infection control measures (including ensuring that users (excluding persons who only order takeaways) scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits

before the persons are allowed to enter the premises; and arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days), the catering premises can provide dine-in services from 5am to 9.59pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than four persons seated together at one table;

(c) If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business does not adopt the specified infection control measures, the catering premises can only provide dine-in services from 5am to 5.59pm every day, with the number of customers at the catering premises at any one time not exceeding 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity of the premises and no more than two persons seated together at one table;

(d) Bars or pubs will continue to be closed;

(e) No live performance, dancing activity, karaoke or mahjong-tin kau activity is allowed in catering premises;

(f) The number of persons participating in any one banquet at any one time may not exceed 20 persons; and

(g) Other requirements and restrictions, including that all persons must wear masks at any time in the premises except when eating or drinking, body temperature screening on persons before entering the premises and providing hand sanitisers, etc.

Scheduled premises

(3) During the specified period, the existing requirements and restrictions applicable to the scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will be maintained, including the requirement that any person within a fitness centre is required to wear a mask at all times, except when having a shower or consuming food/drink at a table in catering premises. Some scheduled premises can be open when the relevant requirements and restrictions are fulfilled (including ensuring that users scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code using the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application on their mobile phones or register their names, contact numbers and the dates and times of their visits before the persons are allowed to enter the premises; and arranging for all staff involved in the operation of the premises to undergo a polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid test for COVID-19 once every 14 days).

(4) Following scheduled premises under Cap. 599F will continue to be closed:

(a) bathhouses;

(b) premises (commonly known as party rooms) that are maintained or intended to be maintained for hire for holding social gatherings;

(c) establishments (commonly known as clubs or nightclubs) that are open late into the night, usually for drinking, and dancing or other entertainment;

(d) karaoke establishments;

(e) mahjong-tin kau premises; and

(f) swimming pools.

Persons responsible for carrying on catering businesses and managers of scheduled premises that contravene the statutory requirements under Cap. 599F would have committed a criminal offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

Group gathering

(5) Unless exempted, the prohibition on group gatherings of more than four persons in public places will continue during the specified period. The requirement is also applicable to group gatherings in catering business and scheduled premises regulated under Cap. 599F in which the relevant requirements or restrictions are not complied with.

Any person who participates in a prohibited group gathering; organises a prohibited group gathering; owns, controls or operates the place of such a gathering; and knowingly allows the taking place of such a gathering commits an offence under Cap. 599G. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months. Persons who participate in a prohibited group gathering may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000.

Mask-wearing requirement

(6) The mandatory mask-wearing requirement under Cap. 599I will be extended during the specified period. During the aforementioned period, a person must wear a mask at all times when the person is boarding or on board a public transport carrier, is entering or present in an MTR paid area, or is entering or present in a specified public place (i.e. all public places, save for outdoor public places in country parks and special areas as defined in section 2 of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208)).

Under Cap. 599I, if a person does not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement, an authorised person may deny that person from boarding a public transport carrier or entering the area concerned, as well as require that person to wear a mask and disembark from the carrier or leave the said area. A person in contravention of the relevant provision commits an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). In addition, authorised public officers may issue fixed penalty notices to persons who do not wear a mask in accordance with the requirement and such persons may discharge liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000.