ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR SINGAPOREAN PMES

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Acknowledging professionals, managers and executives **("PMEs")** as the critical and growing core of Singapore's workforce following the rising education profile of the local population, the Ministry of Manpower **("MOM")** has, on 8 July 2015, announced various new measures to enhance employment and career opportunities for Singaporean PMEs. These measures can be broadly classified into the following three main areas.

Strengthening Singaporean Core of PMEs

From 1 October 2015, as part of the advertising requirement under the Fair Consideration Framework, employers will be required to publish the salary range of the job vacancy in the Jobs Bank or face having their employment pass **("EP")** applications rejected.

MOM will increase scrutiny of EP applications for selected firms which have a weaker Singaporean core of PMEs relative to others in their industry. MOM will require these employers to submit more information to determine whether Singaporeans were considered fairly for employment, including details on the number of applications submitted by Singaporeans, whether Singaporeans were interviewed for the vacancy and the firm's current share of Singaporeans in PME positions at various levels.

The Singapore Workforce Development Agency **("WDA")** will implement a new Career Support Programme for 2 years from 1 October 2015 for eligible PMEs, to encourage employers to employ mature Singaporean PMEs. Employers who employ mature workers, who have been looking for jobs for at least six months, in mid-level jobs that pay at least $4,000, will be given wage support as set out in the following table. To help these workers settle in their new jobs, employers will be required to provide structured on-the-job training or send them for external training.

	For PMEs aged between 40 and 50	For PMEs aged 50 and above
Wage support for first 6 months	20% of gross monthly salary, capped at $1,400 a month	40% of gross monthly salary, capped at $2,800 a month
Wage support for next 6 months	10% of gross monthly salary, capped at $700 a month	20% of gross monthly salary, capped at $1,400 a month

For mature Singaporean PMEs who experience greater difficulties in finding jobs, WDA will collaborate with and provide incentives to private search and placement firms to help these PMEs access more job opportunities. Individuals can seek the help of these firms directly, without going through WDA. This initiative will be launched on 1 October 2015 and will run for two years.

Tripartite partners will work to re-skill Singaporean PMEs whose skills are at higher risk of becoming outdated. The WDA will strengthen its outreach to PMEs through workshops, dedicated career fairs for

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mid-career PMEs and career counselling.

Enhancing the Quality Assessment of Foreign PME Applicants

Currently, in deciding whether to approve a work pass application for a foreign PME, MOM makes an assessment of, inter alia, the foreign PME applicant based on his qualifications, experience and salary. MOM has now indicated that they will:

- reject work pass applications which contain doubtful qualifications such as those from degree mills; and
- pay more attention to the relevant experience of EP and S pass applicants, especially those applying for professional occupations.

Expanding Coverage of Dispute Resolution for Singaporean PMEs

MOM will set up the Employment Claims Tribunal ("**ECT**") in the first quarter of 2016. This will serve as a more accessible and expeditious avenue for resolution of salary-related disputes for PMEs who earn more than $4,500 a month and are not covered by the Employment Act.

The tripartite partners have also agreed to enhance coverage under the Tripartite Mediation Framework, which was initially set up to provide mediation services for PME union members earning less than $4,500 a month and who are working in a non-unionised company, to:

- include re-employment and employment statutory issues;
- remove the salary cap of $4,500 to include all PME union members in non-unionised companies; and
- include rank-and-file union members in non-unionised companies.

The above measures are also expected to have an impact on employers' recruitment considerations, in particular, their recruitment of foreign manpower. Minister Lim Swee Say has cautioned that more firms are expected to be under additional scrutiny from MOM in respect of their hiring practices and are likely to face greater difficulties in getting their EP applications approved. While acknowledging that certain industry sectors may not presently have enough skilled Singaporean PMEs, MOM has indicated that they intend to progressively encourage and facilitate the transfer of expertise to Singaporean PMEs over time.

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