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\$5.7m sought to help job-hunters

Department seeks more backing for fledgling unemployment scheme

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The Labour Department is seeking money from the legislature to expand its go-between service for employers and jobless middle-aged workers, despite a 70 per cent failure rate since its inception in April.

The \$5.7m funding request, to create another 23 posts and turn the present team manning the job-matching programme into a permanent body, was challenged by legislators last night.

They raised doubts about value for money if the scheme did not improve. A paper issued to legislators by the department sought to justify the funding by

highlighting how the scheme targeting unemployed workers aged 30 and over doubled its success rate, from 15.5 to 30 per cent.

That means 420 of the 600 job-seekers under the scheme, or 70 per cent, failed to secure jobs. The scheme was introduced in April to augment the existing service.

A pro-China Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong legislator, Tam Yiu-chung, voiced concern about the scheme's effectiveness.

He said that legislators had no choice but to improve the funding, as he believed opposition to it would trigger a "great response" from the Labour Department. The move to set

up a permanent team also implied that the Government expected no effective measures to relieve the plight of the middle-aged jobless, Tam added.

The Commissioner for Labour, Steven Ip, proposed the establishment of two permanent posts in each of the nine labour employment services offices, and another five-member team responsible for promotion. The department estimates that the expansion will help with about 45 interviews it conducts each day and help tackle up to 2,250 cases.

Amid calls to scrap the labour importation scheme to check rising unemployment, the department maintained that the problem has been caused by a mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market. The scheme is an attempt by the administration to improve integration of its services with the Employment Retraining Board.

The request will be discussed by the Legco Establishment Committee on Thursday.