

Job growth, finally

Resident unemployment rises to 5%, but not a concern, say analysts

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SINGAPORE — Not only did total employment grow for the first time this year, the 15,400 jobs created — the bulk of them in services — between July and September more than made up for the losses in the first half of the year.

On the redundancy front there was better news too, with the 2,200 workers laid off or released early the lowest number in five quarters.

But, amid the mostly uplifting third-quarter labour figures released on Friday, one statistic cast a pall: Resident unemployment,

which rose to 5 per cent from 4.6 per cent, seasonally adjusted.

Not since the Sars outbreak in 2003 saw the figure hit 6.2 per cent has it been so high. In all, 100,300 citizens and permanent residents were estimated to be out of work — a figure analysts attributed to the re-entry of people seeking jobs after completing skills training, or those undergoing training who may have been classified unemployed.

Overall unemployment was 3.4 per cent, up 0.1 per cent from June, according to the Manpower Ministry's preliminary figures.

Structural unemployment could be one factor behind this, said National Trades Union Congress deputy secretary-general Halimah Yacob.

But the mismatch of skills, or between training and jobs available, is becoming less of a problem, she believes.

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"This issue about people being trained and people not being able to find a job — the process has been refined and there's a lot more linkage between jobs and training," she said, citing schemes to place job-seekers with an employer before training begins.

Higher Q3 figures could also be due to those deliberately leaving their jobs to reconsider longer-term career options, said Mr Tim Hird, managing director of Robert Half Singapore. "Typically, employment rate will lag behind economy recovery for six to nine months before stabilising and picking up."

But experts are already calling for employers to pay closer attention to staff retention and rewards.

SERVICES BLOOM

In Q3, 13,400 more service staff were employed — a reflection it would seem of prospects ahead, with the central bank on Thursday forecasting that job creation next year in the sector would be supported by the strong push into palliative care and growth in financial services, especially.

Among financial institutions, demand exists for risk control and management personnel, as well as in business development and sales, said Mr Hird.

Staffing firm Adecco Personnel has seen an "increasing demand" for project managers, and in larger organisations, for business analysts with expertise in corporate planning and budgeting, said branch manager Edlyn Wee.

Childcare, healthcare and security are the other sectors of growth, said Mdm Halimah. The 200 new childcare centres set to open by 2013 will result in a "big scramble" for teachers.

Likewise for healthcare with new hospitals coming up, she added; and, in the current environment of increased vigilance, security employment should also get a boost.

The year ahead for construction may not be as rosy. According to the Monetary

A BETTER Q3

REDUNDANCIES DOWN

Manufacturing: 700 (2,900 in Q2)

Construction: 200 (230 in Q2)

Services: 2,850 (3,300 in Q2)

EMPLOYMENT UP

Manufacturing: +6,600 (+15,900 in Q2)

Construction: 8,100 (4,700 in Q2)

Services: 13,400 (3,800 in Q2)

Authority of Singapore, construction is unlikely to be a key source of job growth in future as major projects such as the integrated resorts near completion.

But the Q3 growth in construction employment is not unusual, as it is an industry that responds with greater time lag, noted Mdm Halimah.

Manufacturing, meanwhile, continued to shed jobs for a fourth straight quarter but at a slower pace, and improved business sentiment particularly in the electronics sector — going by the latest Economic Development Board survey — could be a sign of things to come.

TIME FOR JUST DESSERTS

With the upturn and workers beginning to look out for better opportunities, employers are advised to look beyond just filling their ranks to meet demand.

Adecco's Ms Wee said workers have been flexible about contract and temporary positions over the past few quarters, and employers could take them on as full-time staff.

Added Mdm Halimah: "If companies are doing well, they should consider paying workers bonuses for the sacrifices they have made in helping companies to cut costs and remain viable."

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